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A Labour perspective on xenophobia in South Africa:

A case study of the Metals and Engineering industry in Ekurhuleni

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Abstract

This report looks at an issue that is hidden from the public eye as well as from most sociological research: xenophobia in an industrial workplace. The lack of research on xenophobia in the workplace is a striking phenomenon that could be explained by an assumption that it does not affect progressive trade unions and organized workers.

This report explores whether and how new forms of xenophobia in South Africa are related to the complex interaction between frustrated economic expectations, the reproduction of an apartheid practice that stigmatizes *the other* (albeit along new lines), and a strong nationalistic discourse.

Economic frustration, joblessness and competition over scarce resources (also in terms of government social provision) are elements often used to characterize a context that can be *conducive* to the rise of anti-migrant sentiments and attitudes. In fact, many South African workers consider foreign co-workers to be responsible for 'driving down wages and conditions'; a belief supported by many managers' claims that foreigners work 'harder for less'.

However, little research has been conducted on xenophobia in workplaces. One possible explanation for this may be related to the pervasiveness of a view that assumes that workers are less inclined toward xenophobia than unemployed people. Such a view is rooted in neoclassical economics and considers that workers are not inclined toward xenophobic sentiments because of their 'privileged' employment status. This report interrogates these assumptions by looking into actual relationships between South African and foreign workers in the abode of production and beyond, and at the role played by trade unions in this regard. The research question of this research report is therefore twofold:

- How do workers of different nationalities relate to each other in the workplace, and beyond?
- How does NUMSA position itself in the interaction between workers of different nationalities?

The research carried out at the Marco Polo bus factory in Ekurhuleni has shown that xenophobic sentiments and practices are indeed present in formal workplaces. It thus challenges the assumption underlining the prevalent neglect of workplaces among studies on xenophobia in South Africa, namely that xenophobia will be found among unemployed people or informal workers but not in formal workplaces. NUMSA officials who emphasize the difficulty in tackling xenophobia among members confirmed the finding. The difficulty is explained by the fact that members are embedded in a climate characterized by suspicion toward foreigners; such suspicion is amplified by the national discourse and reinforced in communities.

Examples of solidarity among workers of different nationalities have nevertheless also been documented, with individual shopstewards playing an active role in trying to bridge the national divide. However, it emerges that the union has not as yet developed a coherent strategy to address xenophobia in the workplace.

There is a gap between the leadership's understanding of xenophobia, which is grounded in class analysis and based on principles of class solidarity and worker unity, and the perceptions of workers on the ground. The latter tend to see foreign nationals as a threat; in this regard their views conform to the widespread xenophobic climate rather then to the official union stance.

This disjuncture between the union's national and local levels results in a failure to address xenophobia in workplaces and in communities. Otherwise the management of anti-migrant sentiments in the workplace is basically left to those individual shopstewards who choose to engage the workers about such biases. These sentiments are also *de facto* managed by employers.

Declaration:
I declare that apart from the work of other people, which has been accordingly recognised, this report is my original work. It is submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, for the Degree in MA in Labour Policy and Globalisation. The present report has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at another university

Miriam Di Paola

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Chapter 1: Looking into the hidden abode of production

1.1 Introduction

This report will look at an issue, which is hidden from the public eye as well as from most sociological research: xenophobia in an industrial workplace. The 'hidden abode of production' is a secretive space whose entrance is barred, as Karl Marx wrote, by a sign reading "No admittance except on business" (Marx, 1976); heeding this advice, attention to xenophobia in South Africa has not sought entrance into formal workplaces, focusing almost exclusively in places of reproduction, such as townships or informal settlements and occasionally on informal economic activities.

In this research report, the presence of xenophobia in workplaces will be explored, and its significance unpacked. Since the main reason for the lack of research on this issue is related to an assumption that progressive trade unions and organized workers can resist (or even oppose) reactionary feelings, the site of research (the Marco Polo factory) is unionized, and the response of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) will be analysed. Marco Polo, a product of Brazilian investment, is located in South Africa's industrial heartland, Ekurhuleni, and represents an example of labour-capital relations at the core of the country's formal productive structure. This is the very kind of place where the public eye does not enter, and where it is assumed that workers are not that badly off, or even 'over-paid' (Schüssler, 2012). Upon entrance, this impression will quickly be dispelled.

Xenophobic incidents have been registered in South Africa since the early 1990s (Crush 2008*;* Hlatshwayo 2010). This does not mean that there was no xenophobia[1] during the apartheid regime, as will be discussed in the literature review, but only to underline that it has become an 'issue' since the political transition that the country underwent at the beginning of the 1990s (Neocosmos, 2006; Crush, 2003).

The rise of anti-migrant sentiments has been of interest for the labour movement since the beginning of its exacerbation in the 1990s, as demonstrated by COSATU's pamphlets on the issue (Collins, 1998). In 1995, addressing the COSATU International Policy Conference, its President John Gonomo declared:

"The demon of xenophobia has been used worldwide to divide workers, to exploit migrants, and to undermine trade union unity. If we give one inch on this slippery slope, we are signing our death warrant as a trade union movement" (quoted in Collins, 1998, p.18).

In contemporary South Africa, there is a tension between theory and practice in the position of the labour movement towards xenophobia. On the one hand, some union officials stress the role of trade unions in defusing tensions based on nationality, at least in the workplace (Parsely and Everatt, 2010). On the other hand, the fact that xenophobic violence widely affects working people testifies to the inability of the labour movement 'to state *politically* the commonality of all working people in South Africa irrespective of communitarian origins' (Neocosmos, 2006, p. 62).

[1] In this report the term xenophobia is used in relation to ethnic and national affiliations. The general category of xenophobia includes not only violence against foreign nationals, but also practices such as discrimination in accessing services, sentiments and attitudes (Polzer, 2012).

It is however important to note that the labour movement has been an important engine of worker unity in the 1980s (Maree, 1987; Webster, 1988). Although conflicts and competition based on ethnicity and nationality did occur (von Holdt, 2003; McNamara 1997, Barchiesi 2006), unions were able to transcend divisions introduced or exacerbated by the apartheid regime.

The great transition toward political democracy had a substantial impact on the position of the labour movement in South Africa (von Holdt, 2002). Principles that had been asserted and fought for during the struggle against apartheid inside and beyond the workplace, such as class solidarity and the unity of the workers, have undergone a process of transformation as they fissured along new and old lines. Processes of elite-formation, a dramatic acceleration of differentiation among workers, and commodification of services have been identified as causal factors that have diluted militancy and solidarity among organized labour in contemporary South Africa (Barchiesi 2004; von Holdt, 2003; Pillay, 2012).

Concurrently, the government, of which the labour movement is an important supporter through the Congress of South African Trade Unions' (COSATU) participation in ruling the tripartite alliance (which also comprises the African National Congress [ANC] and the South African Communist Party [SACP]), has put a strong emphasis on the construction of a new *national* identity. This has posed new challenges to the above-mentioned *class-based* solidarity principles of organized labour.

Xenophobia in South Africa has to be contextualized in relation to the economic structure and the political context. Research has shown how governments in migrants' countries of destination tend to use anti-immigration discourse and policies to divert

popular anger during economic crises (Castles, 2009). South Africa has experienced an enduring economic crisis since the 1970s, which was exacerbated by the impact of the global crisis in 2008/09, which led to a million job losses in manufacturing (Mohamed, 2010). In this context, emphasizing the meaning of *otherness* along national lines is consistent with the mainstream political discourse which emerged with democracy and which resorts to 'banal nationalism' as an essential cement of society. Thus, according to Neocosmos (2006), the post-apartheid state has engineered a distinction between citizens and foreigners in opposition to the one forged by the apartheid state: this has entailed rejecting the *racial* element intrinsic in the apartheid distinction. It is however also different from the popular national identity based on political agency and forged by the popular struggle in the 1980s because the 'new' distinction implies a de-politicisation of the nation and reduce citizenship to indigeneity.

Both at the national and at the local levels, the adoption of a nationalistic discourse is expanding (Landau 2011; Neocosmos 2006), which may be useful in diverting people's frustration away from a focus on (unmet) social and economic aspirations. In a context of rising inequality and marginalization, nationalistic discourse and practices may, however, create or exacerbate social divisions and constitute a fertile terrain for violence, harassment by state officials and lack of social security. Undeniably, xenophobic mobilization generates major insecurity, in particular (though not only) for foreigners.

One of the hypotheses in this report will therefore be whether and how new forms of xenophobia in South Africa are related to the complex interaction between frustrated economic expectations, the reproduction of an apartheid practice that stigmatizes *the other* (albeit along new lines), and a strong nationalistic discourse, which

is formalised by legislation but ignores migration as a central element of the country's history[2].

Economic frustration, joblessness and competition over scarce resources (in terms of government social provision) are elements often used to characterize a context that can be *conducive* to the rise of anti-migrant sentiments and attitudes (Gelb 2008; Pillay, 2008; Altman, 2008). In fact, many South African workers consider foreign co-workers to be responsible for 'driving down wages and conditions'; a belief supported by many managers' claims that foreigners work 'harder for less' (Collins, 1998).

As a result, it could be expected that the workplace, as a prime locus of daily competition – over and above that related to access employment – for access to economic and symbolic resources, would be prone to witnessing clashes of interest between foreign and South African workers over promotions, or access to benefits and bonuses, for instance. Counter-intuitively though, the literature records few xenophobic incidents in workplaces, Misago (2009) being an exception: he investigated anti-migrant violent mobilization in the agricultural sector in De Doorns, Western Cape, and found that labour brokers may have fuelled tensions between South African and Zimbabwean workers and triggered the violence by local residents.

However, little research has been conducted on xenophobia in workplaces as there is a dominant perception that workers are not inclined toward xenophobic sentiments because of their 'privileged' employment status and an associated reluctance

[2] As will be discussed in the literature review, migrant labour has been central to the development of the South African economy and society.

to explore xenophobia among workers[3]. The little evidence of xenophobic violence in workplaces in turn, supposedly justifies this assumption. Such a perception echoes the pervasive neoclassical economics interpretation of participation in violence as a result of cost and opportunity calculus. Cramer (2010) refers to the work of Becker (1968), Hirshleifer (1994; 2001), Collier (2000) among the others, and points out how according to neoclassical economics the relation between unemployment or underemployment and participation in violence is straightforward and labour is considered only in relation to the material gains it provides. "Given the low opportunity cost of violence to the poor, they have a comparative advantage in violence. Those without access to legal, cooperative gainful employment were more likely to maximise their utility by recourse to violent conflict and extortion" (Cramer, 2011 p 3). This interpretation albeit not supported by substantial empirical research has been influential in economics as well as in other social sciences approaching the relationship between labour market status and participation in violence.

This would be all the more true for those who are union members, because of the assumed influence of the inclusive class solidarity discussed above.

This report aims to interrogate these assumptions by looking into actual relationships between South African and foreign workers in the abode of production and beyond, and at the role played by trade unions in this regard. The research question of this research report is therefore twofold:

[3] The discussion on my research proposal, for instance, was marked by comments on the choice of the formal workplace as non-appropriate because according to some of the professors participating in the discussion I would have not found anything there in terms of xenophobic discrimination.

- How do workers of different nationalities relate to each other in the workplace, and beyond?
- How does NUMSA position itself in the interaction between workers of different nationalities?

1.2 Purpose of the research

I aim to explore the interaction between South African and foreign workers and the role of the trade union in mediating this interaction. Specific attention to the workplace will be paid but interactions in communities and the role of the union outside the workplace will be also considered. This study looks at xenophobia from a labour perspective, meaning that xenophobia is viewed as a line of fracture among the working people.

It is necessary to define who the 'workers', or 'working people', are, especially in a context where different and sometimes contradictory categories are used to define them (for a more detailed discussion on the categories that dominate the literature see Chapter 2, section 5). This study adopts an inclusive definition of working people based on the Marxian concept of working class, explained in more detail in the theoretical framework, Chapter 2, section 2. Such a definition, while acknowledging differences and fragmentations in the world of work (for instance between formal and informal workers or between employed and unemployed people), avoids distracting from the *common* fate of the different groups that make up the working class, both in terms of their separation from the means of production and of their relationship to the capitalist class.

The study aims to investigate the topic of xenophobia at the core of the formal economy as well as of the labour movement. Therefore, the investigation will focus on

the COSATU-affiliated NUMSA which, with 300.000[4] members, is the country's second largest industrial union and one of most militant segments of the national (and international) labour movement. The metal industry is a central sector of the South African economy and is therefore at the core of capital-labour relations in the national system of accumulation. Ashman et al. (2011) argue that, alongside the boom experienced by the financial sector in the past 15 years, the country's economy remains dominated by a cluster of industries mainly linked to mining and energy, referred to as the minerals-energy complex (MEC).

The area where the research has been conducted in Ekurhuleni, in Gauteng province, which has the highest concentration of industrial enterprises and output in South Africa, and even in Africa, as well as a large concentration of internal and external migrant[5] workers, attracted by job opportunities.

1.3 Rationale

This report constitutes an empirical exploration into a neglected area of research: the interaction between South Africans and foreign nationals in the workplace and the role of NUMSA in this interaction.

It is striking how the literature on xenophobia in the workplace is extremely limited and how even explanatory theories of xenophobia that consider the employment/unemployment factor are based on economic models and theoretical assumptions rather than empirical investigation.

[4] NUMSA, 2012, Book 2b, Secretarial Report Organizational Matters, available at: http://numsa.org.za/admin/assets/articles/attachments/00032_book_2b_secretariat_report.pdf

[5] In this report, unless otherwise specified, the term 'migrant' refer to migrants from outside South Africa.

The theoretical assumption underlining this gap in the literature is that workers, in particular formal and unionized ones have, unlike the poor[6], little reason for being xenophobic since the opportunity cost for them to participate in violence is higher than the one of the poor as they may lose their job, moreover workers would not be victims of the alleged 'stealing of jobs' by migrants[7]. This assumption is problematic because it takes for granted the widespread perception that foreigners *do* pose an economic threat to South Africans, while this should be a subject of empirical investigation of the actual position of foreigners in the labour market. Moreover, such an assumption does not question whether workers are xenophobic or not.

In this study, on the contrary, xenophobia is assumed to exist among the working class, thus challenging the mainstream assumption that workers are not xenophobic. This will require, as a second step, seeking to ground this assumption through an empirical exploration.

I.4 Structure of the study

The report is organized in five chapters, including this introduction in which the research and its originality have been discussed, together with the aims of the research and its relevance, positioning it in the broader literature on xenophobia.

The second chapter provides a review of the literature relevant to the topic. Several streams of literature are thus discussed, including: labour migration in South Africa, the role of NUMSA as an example of social movement unionism, an outline of the

[6] Often referred to as people who are out of employment and willing to work. In relation to the separation between workers and the poor in South Africa see Schüssler, 2012.
[7] This point will be developed in chapter 2, paragraph 6.

main explanatory models of xenophobia in South Africa, analyses of the changing economic structure and the resulting transformations of the labour market.

In chapter three, the methodology is addressed, with a description of the strengths and weaknesses of the research instruments adopted. The structure and timeframe of the empirical investigation will be presented together with ethical issues related to qualitative research. This chapter includes a reflection on the limitations of the study.

Chapter four presents the main findings from the fieldwork and discusses them in relation to the theoretical framework and to the literature relevant to the topic. Findings on the actual presence of xenophobic mobilization in the workplace will be discussed as well as the role that some individual NUMSA shopstewards have in mediating tensions based on nationality, when they occur.

Chapter five is the conclusion and assesses the main findings in relation to the research questions and to the aim of the report.

Chapter 2: Literature Review. Organized labour and xenophobia beyond the rhetoric

2.1 Introduction

In order to contextualize the issue of xenophobia in South Africa and the position of the labour movement toward this issue several bodies of literature - which cross between different disciplines including sociology, political economy, migration studies and political sciences - have been consulted.

Before introducing the literature review, the chapter will outline the theoretical framework of the study; it includes a discussion of the Marxian definition of the working class and its validity in contemporary South Africa, and the outline of the development of the debate on race, nation and class identities in South African. The latter section, far from being exhaustive, aims to provide an idea of the background study to the literature review.

The literature review will start with an overview of the history of migration in South Africa, focusing in particular on the labour migration system established during the colonial rule and institutionalised by the apartheid government.

From there, the rise and establishment of the labour movement will be observed, with a specific focus on NUMSA and its role beyond the workplace; thus the concept of social movement unionism will be considered.

The literature review will proceed outlining the main explanatory models of xenophobia in post-apartheid South Africa; most of the literature reviewed in this section have developed in the aftermath of the xenophobic violence of 2008 but the

selected works tend to have a theoretical perspective and provide an interpretation that transcend the description of the facts of 2008 –descriptive accounts and media reports have not been included in the review because they lack interpretative insights and reference to explanatory models.

The last two sections of the literature review will examine literature on the structural elements of the South African economic development. The literature on the changing economic structure in relation to globalization and to the country's specificities will be reviewed. Finally an outline of the literature on the changing structure of the labour market, with a focus on casualization and political fragmentation will be provided.

2. 2 Theoretical framework

Marx's army

According to Karl Marx, as the process of capital accumulation spread, it did not only create new jobs but also new unemployment, especially through the transformation of pre-capitalist farmers (peasants), cattle raisers and artisans into proletarians, which make up the working class, namely people who are separated from their means of reproduction therefore forced to sell their labour power to survive.

Orthodox economics focuses exclusively on labour market status to define people's position in society and therefore tends to strongly differentiate among workers and unemployed people, the latter also referred to as the poor (Shussler, 2012, among others) or the underclass (Nattrass and Seekings, 2006). On the contrary Marxian political economy offers a more inclusive, albeit nuanced interpretation; it focuses on

the relation to the means of production and differentiates between who owns them (capitalists) and who does not own them (the working class or the proletariat) independently from their actual position in the labour market, position subjected to unpredictable fluctuations. The proletariat includes workers as well as the reserve army of labour (the unemployed people) a disadvantaged section of the working class that performs two functions in capitalist accumulation. First, it helps regulate wages and workers' demands through the pressure exerted on the employed workers by the competition of the disposable reserve army; and secondly to respond to the increased needs of production in periods of economic expansion.

The reserve army, also called surplus population, is a product of capitalist accumulation -due to the increasing technical composition of capital[8], or mechanization of production- but also a lever in periods of expansion. For example, if one sphere of industry undergoes a sudden expansion, "there must be the possibility of suddenly throwing great masses of men into the decisive area without doing any damage to the scale of production in other spheres. The surplus population supplies these masses" (Marx, 1976: 784). The growth of wealth alternates with periods of contraction where the reserve army increases. Moreover, in the long run, as the productivity of labour increases, due to technological progress, more workers will be available than those required by the production process and those workers will end up swelling the ranks of the surplus population. Marx thus defines the working class as divided into an active army – employed workers – and a reserve army, which includes all the workers that are only partially employed or wholly unemployed.

[8] The technical composition of capital is the relation between the mass of means of production and human labour; it depends on the features of a given industry or sector and the overall economic development and technological progress.

The reserve army includes a floating, a latent and a stagnant segment. The definition is outlined in *Capital*, vol. I, ch. 25.4, where the last segment - the stagnant one - is also characterized as a dead segment, it includes a layer of workers who are permanently unemployed because of "the combination of the rhythm and characteristics of accumulation and their own perceived unsuitability for capitalist employment, whether because of age, gender, background, past experiences or lack thereof" (Fine and Saad-Filho, 2010); the floating segment is made up of labourers flowing from pre-capitalist to capitalist modes of production and vice versa (e.g. from subsistence agriculture to wage employment). The latent segment is made up of atypical, low-income employment, part-time- workers, outsourced, precarious and low paid workers.

The sophistication of the working class goes deeper and includes the unemployable and the paupers. What it is important to note in relation to the topic investigated is that the Marxian understanding of the working class includes and actually explores the many facets of a whole class that may be highly diverse; in the process of exploration and in the acknowledgment of diversity the broader picture is not lost because the commonality of the different segments resides in their relation to the means of production.

Workers in a capitalist economy are under economic compulsion to sell their labour-power in order to survive and reproduce themselves. No matter if the worker is partially, informally or permanently employed or even unemployed, his or her relationship to the process of production is shaped by the separation from the means of reproduction and production, including land, capital and machinery. The history of Southern Africa shows that if there is no economic compulsion for the workers to sell

their labour-power then repressive juridical and political compulsions have to be put in place to deliver the necessary workforce to capital in order to survive and develop.

My interest in the topic relates to the assumption that divisions along national and ethnic lines may be detrimental to the process of class formation and may undermine the ability of workers to defend their interest in the economic relationship with capital (class struggle). Qualitative and quantitative research (among others, Szimanski, 1976; Reich, 1971) has shown how sectarian divisions in the working class based on race, ethnicity, or religion inhibit union growth and labour militancy. These divisions may have a negative impact on workers' material and symbolic position in the workplace as well as in society. Reich (ibid.) points out how, in the United States, racial antagonism deflected workers' concerns from the defence of their class position; in particular, he found that racial antagonism affected the outcomes of American workers demands on issues of quality education and access to healthcare.

In other words, divisions along racial or ethnic lines in the working class can affect the process of conscentization of workers as a class for itself, a class struggling in political terms. According to Marx , workers are made a class by capitalist accumulation because in this process they are deprived of their means of reproduction and their economic interest converge. The competition with capital unites them and they start cooperating to defend their economic interest (higher wages, shorter working days, better working conditions, etc.). During the struggle though the economic interest becomes political as capitalists and workers develop in the struggle conflicting political aims, in Marx's interpretation, respectively the strengthening of capitalism and its overthrowing. Marx describes the process of political conscentisation:

"Economic conditions had first transformed the mass of the people of the country into workers. The combination of capital has created for this mass a common situation, common interests. This mass is thus already a class as against capital, but not yet *for itself*. In the struggle, (...) this mass becomes united, and constitutes itself as a class *for itself*. The interests it defends become class interests. But the struggle of class against class is a political struggle." Marx, K, 1847, *The Poverty of Philosphy*, P 79.

Background concepts: Race, class and nation in South Africa

According to Marxist sociology, concepts of race, nation and class are not natural but produced and transformed by economic and political structures (Burawoy 1981; Anthony Marx 1992). In South African history, the different sets of identities relate to each other in a constant tension mirrored in the way workers produced a subjective construction of themselves which was neither exclusive nor static; it has rather been a constant process of emphasising one identity over the others. The rhetoric of the union movement, which focuses on class solidarity clashes with anti-foreigners feelings, which are widespread in South African society (Crush, 2008). Workers have of course not chosen exclusively and consistently one identity; they have on the contrary adapted in response to structural factors and changed in a dialectical relation with their leadership's new formulations of the political discourse (A. Marx, 1992).

It is useful to look at the history of resistance against white oppression in South Africa to understand the alternation and overlapping of class identity with race and nation.

Anthony Marx (1998) points out how the growing importance of racial identity among blacks, at the beginning of the twentieth century, can be seen as a response to the

transformation of the system of domination from colonial rule –which provoked tribal responses- to an institutionalized racial rule after the end of the Boer war. Out of the change in the structure of domination emerged the common interest between English and Afrikaners to establish white supremacy: "Racial domination constructed the category of a subordinated race as such, in effect forcing previously disparate groups into a common identification" (A. Marx, 1992: p. 195).

Economic and political structures play a pivotal role in shaping identities, which in turn influence these structures in a dialectical relation. For instance, the use of repression by the state in the 1960s was also a response to the success of the Defiance Campaign and other form of protest put forward by the ANC and the PAC throughout the 1950s.

The relationship between the different sets of identities forged in opposition to apartheid changed in the late 1960s in favour of a greater emphasis on race, with intellectual advancement taking precedence over organizational consolidation. The Black Consciousness (BC) movement argued that the liberation of blacks has to start at the level of the individual and that a proper 'attitude of mind' would engender the right 'way of life' (Magazinier, 2009). In this view, the production of ideas must be the first step of resistance. BC ideologues saw as 'blacks' all the people who suffered from the political, economic and social discrimination of the apartheid system and who must refuse to be subservient to the rulers. More than being exclusive against white liberals, the BC movement was inclusive of all the oppressed and thus was opposed to ethnicity and nationality as a unit of identification, considered to be a tool of the *divide and rule* strategy of the government: "Blackness was entirely of that particularly historical moment. Those called black –and those who called themselves black- were adults

without ancestors" (Magazinier, *ibid*., p. 228). The BC presence on the ground was relatively limited and concentrated in universities and among intellectuals. The strength of its ideas permeated and invigorated the opposition but its lean organizational structures were easily crushed after the Soweto uprising in 1976.

Resistance was re-organized in the 1970s in a more local and mass-based way, under the leadership of *Charterists.*[9] Building solid structures on the ground became a priority of a strategy aiming to the maximum involvement of all people to challenge directly the institutions of domination (A. Marx, 1992). The relation between the different sets of identities changed consequently, emphasizing the importance of national unity and away from the exclusion of whites (as per the BC view), whose presence in the movement became strategic also from the point of view of the resources that the newly organized structures needed in order to recruit members and carry out large campaigns.

The union movement added well organized, disciplined and more democratic structures to the resistance to apartheid. It succeeded in making central in the opposition agenda the issues of economic transformation and material conditions of the masses. Class identity became prevalent, even if always intersected with race and ethnicity, and union ideas of socialist revolution and practices of democracy, derived from the shop floor based organization, spread outside the workplace. The presence of organized labour in community struggles became prominent from the late 1970s onwards. The attempt of the state to regulate and control black unionization through the recognition of black trade unions in 1979 gave even more impetus to the process and allowed labour to occupy a central position in the opposition.

[9]Activists linked to the older generation of ANC members who promoted the Freedom Charter.

A strategy aimed at mitigating growing unrest, in fact, gave the trade unions an opportunity for expanding their membership, increasing their bargaining power inside the workplace and their legitimacy outside it. The working class recognized itself as such and the vehicle of its increasing influence was the union movement, while unions were in turn demonstrating class solidarity through the leveraging of their position in production to support community struggles (A. Marx 1992).

During the long history of opposition to the apartheid regime ethnic identity underwent a process of transformation and dilution due to economic development, urbanization, manipulation of ethnicity from the state and the emergence of broader identities among people from different backgrounds who shared similar grievances. Ethnic identity did not, however, disappear and the eve of the negotiations between the National Party and the ANC was marked by violent ethnic conflicts, fuelled by under cover intervention of the apartheid government- with the Inkatha Freedom Party.

Since the early 1990s, the process of nation building has been characterized by an inclusive discourse towards reconciliation of all South Africans and, at the same time, "official and informal imaginings of a unified nation have rested upon vicious demarcation that solidified those included by distinguishing those excluded" (A. Marx, 1998: 275). After the first democratic elections in 1994, national identity was stressed in order to ease a dramatic process of 'forgiving and forgetting' between the oppressed and their oppressors, a process epitomized by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The risk of resorting to such a shortcut is that it could pave the way to the promotion of a chauvinistic nationalism, recreating previous conceptions of 'us' and 'them', and replacing black and white with South African and non-South African (Marais, 2011).

One of the aims of this research is to shed light on how one of progressive forces that played a crucial part in overcoming racial oppression is opposing or adapting to new forms of exclusion.

In a new political structure founded on the end of racial domination and on liberal democracy, interestingly enough, the focus on race and ethnicity has far from faded. The economic structure is still marked by gross – even increasing - inequality (the poorest 20% of South Africans receive 1.6% of total income while the richest 20% receive 70%[10]), high levels of structural unemployment (a broad unemployment rate, that include who have given up looking for jobs ranged between 34% and 40% in the 2000s, Marais 2011) and increasing numbers of working poor. As it will be addressed in greater detail in the chapters 2.5 and 2.6, changes in patterns of employment and organization of production, started during the end of apartheid and accelerated in the new South Africa. The spread of these new patterns of employment have made the bulk of the workforce more casualised and poorer than ever: "companies now rely on a shrinking core of skilled full-time workers and a larger stock of less-skilled, casual or outsourced labour that is deprived of the wages, benefits and rights" (Marais, 2011: 181).

In Marais' (2011), interpretation, the mid 1990s concept of rainbow nation, widely used (and abused) but never precisely defined and based on the pride of being African and South African, gave way to a narrower and more conservative resort to traditions, culture and ethnicity. The reasons are multiple but again tied in a dialectical relationship to the political system (electoral democracy accompanied by a widening

[10]The Presidency of the Republic of South Africa, *Development Indicators 2009*, p. 23, available from http://www.thepresidency.gov.za

gap between elites and their constituency on the ground) and to the economic structure which created a layer of black bourgeoisie without addressing the daily experience of poverty and socio-economic frustration that the majority of South Africans still face.

2.3 The labour migration system in colonial and apartheid South Africa[11]

The migrant-labour system has been a structural feature of capital accumulation in South Africa since the late nineteenth century when diamond and gold mining started, respectively in 1867 and in 1886 (Marais, 2011). The economic system developed around the mineral and energy complex (Fine and Rustomjee, 1996) and grounded on the exploitation of a cheap, strictly controlled black African labour force.

The process of proletarianization in South Africa was made possible through administrative and coercive measures that unravelled the independence of black African peasantry. If, on the one hand, colonial power and the apartheid regime put in place vigorous legislation to assure the 'white character' of the nation, on the other hand separation from the black population was never achieved and, in fact, the regulatory system was never fully capacitated to accomplish the task. The reason lies on the unbearable costs of total separation but also on the structural features of the colony, inherited by the state since the creation of the Union of South Africa in 1910. In order to remain profitable white owned businesses, primarily mines but also agriculture and

[11] For a more comprehensive literature, see among the others Crush, J., Jeeves, A. & Yudelman, D., 1991, *South Africa's Labour Empire: A History of Black Migrancy to the Gold Mines,* David Philip & Westview: Cape Town & Boulder; Moodie, T.D. with Ndaatshe, V., 1994, *Going for Gold: Men, Mines and Migrancy in South Africa*, U niversity of California Press: Berkeley; James, W., 1992, Our Precious Metal: African Labour in South Africa's Gold Industry, 1970-1990, David Philip, James Currey and Indiana University Press: Cape Town, Londond & Bloomington; Tshitereke, C., & Crush, J., "Contesting Migrancy: The Foreign Labour Debate in Post-1994 South Africa" *Africa Today* 48(3) (2001): 49-72 Jonathan Crush and Clarence Tshitereke, "Contesting Migrancy: The Foreign Labour Debate in Post-1994 South Africa" *Africa Today* 48(3) (2001): 49-72.

industries, relied heavily on the black workforce. The exclusionary character of the state was explicit since its onset and the task of the white population of the Union, in the words of Louis Botha, was to have "one people to make a great White man's land of South Africa for our land and for generations to come"[12]. Nevertheless, the state needed black Africans from the Union as well as from abroad; supplying countries included present-day Lesotho, Botswana, Malawi, Mozambique and Swaziland.

In order to regulate and strictly select migrants thus facilitating the entry of the white European population and limiting the flow of Indians from other English colonies and black Africans from the rest of the continent, the Union adopted its first migration legislation in 1913, the Immigrants Regulation Act, which remained a cornerstone of South Africa's immigration legislation into the 2000s (Peberdy, S. 2009). The Act created a two-tier system that denied black Africans access to South Africa while ensured the continuation, and actual institutionalization of black labour supply from abroad through the introduction of an exemption clause to allow entry under bilateral agreements with a neighbouring state. Migrant workers could enter the country only as contract workers on temporary permits, therefore they were not allowed to claim permanent residence nor to be accompanied by their families. Moreover, their permits were strictly dependent on the will of the employer to keep them and they have no rights to look for other jobs.

The South African economic system has been since the beginning characterized by definitive and systematic divisions of the labour force and society as a whole, along racial and ethnic lines. The apartheid regime represents one stage of racial segregation.

[12] Cited in Peberdy, S. 2009, *Selecting Immigrants. National identities and South Africa's Immigration Policies 1910-2008.*

It was a rather complex policy of administrative and geographical separation where a tight knit mesh of laws emanating from at least nine departments (Foreign Affairs, Home Affairs, Cooperation and Development, Police, Defence, Justice, Community Development, Trade and Industry, Agriculture, Minerals and Energy, and Transport) organised the movement of people. As a result, the laws that used to regulate immigration, circulation, work and housing of black migrants during apartheid were complex and sometime inconsistent, leaving state officials with a large extent of discretional power.

Vigneswaran (2011) notes how the roots of exclusionary practices, still visible today in civil servants behaviour toward migrants, are embedded in some of the state institutions: for instance, routines and both formal and informal procedures that characterize the Department of Home Affairs, according to this vision, still bear the legacy of their own formation as institutions originally designed to implement policies of racial segregation.

In general, during the colonial and apartheid rule, not only were unskilled African workers strictly separated from the skilled white workforce by a racial division of labour, but they were also confined to 'homelands' or into slums in the periphery of urban centres, in which black Africans have been prevented from leaving until the early 1990s.

Competition and tension between a black urban proletariat settled in township and migrant workers living in single-sex barracks called compound or hostels (Crush, 1992; von Holdt, 2002 and 2003) arose in the 1940s. The latter were migrants either from South African homelands or from abroad, especially from Malawi, Southern

Rhodesia and Mozambique. In the mining industry in the 1970s resentment from South African workers toward Basotho and Zimbabweans was widespread, resulting from competition for better positions, such as shaft diggers, generally accessed by migrants (McNamara, 1988). Anti-migrant sentiments existed during apartheid and before, they were also a product of a deliberate division of workers into artificial categories that formed competing groups. Tensions often reflected the apartheid organization of the labour process and of housing. If the occupational structure in the workplace was racially defined (von Holdt, 2002) among the oppressed blacks, migrants (from the homelands and from neighbouring countries) were often employed in the toughest and lowest paid jobs. Moreover, migrant workers were living in segregated and strictly controlled hostels while the 'locals' were accommodated in townships.

The different institutions responsible for enforcing migrant legislation developed a wide range of paternalistic justifications: crime control, influx control against over-crowding, labour separation to boost competitiveness, housing management and health provision for those who were working for the white economy. Over the decades various justifications merged in a more comprehensive paternalistic discourse that focused on the protection of the 'legitimate' black population against the threat of 'illegitimate' outsiders.

When, in the mid 1980s, the government decided to abandon influx controls and institutional segregation, the paternalistic discourse as well as the complex nature of the law were absorbed in the new migration policies. At that time, an exclusionary rhetoric targeting migrants from outside South Africa replaced the discourse around the need to control the black population and thus started an institutional differentiation between internal and external migrants. The concern about the need to protect unskilled local

labour from the competition posed by foreign workers became popular in the Parliament and in the media (Vigneswaran, 2011).

The immigration policy (the Aliens Control Act of 1991) adopted after the abandonment of influx controls, far from responding to the new patterns of immigration, was a *maquillage* of the existing Aliens Control provision to further empower the Department of Home Affairs and police officials in controlling migrants to prevent crime, including a reinforcement of their right to inspect premises.

If from the end of the 19th century until the mid 1980s the labour migration regime was highly controlled in order to respond to economic needs set by the South African state and allied industrial organizations, it has to be noted that from the 1970s the situation of some of the most crucial sectors of the economy started to change. In the mines, for instance, the state and mining companies progressively lost control of foreign labour as a consequence of the independence achieved by several African countries and therefore the end of bilateral agreements with formerly colonies.

Since the early 1990s central organization of productive priorities has been reduced and, as a consequence, the flow of migrants became largely unmanaged and more diverse (Polzer, 2008). The rising uncertainty about new, and little studied, immigration patterns was accompanied by an aggressive discourse about the need to protect the incumbent democracy by the threat posed by illegal migrants.

2.4 Unions against divisions. NUMSA then and now

The South African labour movement is one of the most vibrant in the world and trade union consciousness represents an important cement in society. In the 1970s, after decades of subordination, black workers launched a struggle for recognition and a broader challenge to the apartheid workplace, which intensified in the 1980s challenging the government inside the workplace and in communities. Inaugurated by the Durban strikes of 1973 and the Soweto revolt of 1976, a period of wide political upheaval in the factories and in township started which intertwined student and then popular protest with the growth of black trade unionism.

In a context of lack of legitimacy of the state and, from around 1982, economic recession, a new form of unionism emerged; it was solidly based on the production process –the mining and the metal sectors were among the first to be organized– but looking beyond the 'mere' organization of workers in workplaces toward mobilizations in communities over economic and political issues. Webster (1988) describes the high level of mobilizations that characterized the 1980s as marked by the highest strike levels in the history of the country: 'rent strikes, bus boycotts, school boycotts, consumer boycotts, anti-Constitution campaigns and stayaways became permanent features of the political terrain' (p.185).

From the strategic position labour occupied in the production process it aimed to alter the sphere of reproduction, "furthermore it place[d] a strong emphasis on democracy and workers' control" (Webster 1988: 195). In South Africa, the recognition of black trade unions instead of normalising industrial relations led to growing politicisation of the workplace in the perspective of a radical transformation of society.

In 1982 Joe Foster, General Secretary of the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) called explicitly union members to be involved in the broader political struggle and to affirm principles of workers' control beyond production (Foster, J. 1982).

In the same period the newly formed black trade unions began confronting trade union internationalism. FOSATU and later, and more strongly COSATU, managed to intervene strategically in the international labour movement. The task was accomplished in the vision of the need of strengthening 'South-South workers' solidarity' and coincided with developments in the South of political and social movement unionism in countries struggling against authoritarian capitalism, notably Brazil, the Philippines and South Korea (Pillay, 2012).

In the 1980s, at the peak of its successes in the workplace and popularity in society, the South African labour movement was not immune from tensions based on ethnicity and area of origin. Although internal contestation and tension were present even in very militant unions like NUMSA, the level of unity of black workers against white oppression was a central component of the collective identity of the labour movement. Von Holdt (2002) argues that from this point of view *popular consciousness* was at least as important as *class consciousness* in forging union identity and solidarity among black workers. The union was mostly able to transcend ethnic divisions that the government tried to crystallize, in order to strengthen the unity of workers toward the advancement of their position in the labour process and the building of a united front aiming at overthrowing apartheid.

What has been named social movement unionism represented in South Africa the alliance of interests of different groups, including highly politicized community organizations and the national liberation movement, with the interests the labour movement (von Holdt, 2002). It was also characterized by high level of internal democracy and by the commitment to the political transformation of the authoritarian regime into democracy.

From a class analysis perspective it is particularly interesting to look at NUMSA, one of the most militant segments of South African organized labour, because its role, particularly in highly industrialized areas, epitomizes labour-capital relations in South Africa; moreover we can roughly expect to find there relevant examples of trade unions' policies and practices toward migrant workers.

It is important to consider that as social movement unionism in the 1980s was embedded in the broader struggle against an authoritarian regime, since the early 1990s, with the transition toward democracy, it encountered a significant transformation. In the literature this transformation is defined in different ways: von Holdt (2002, 2003) speaks about *strategic unionism* and focuses on the new political context that unionists felt they were part of and thus opted for a 'more muted activism and a concern with economic development' (von Holdt, 2002: 293); Pillay (2012) defines the new role of the organized labour in South Africa as *political unionism* and argues that while involved in state political struggle, the new trade unionism gradually shifted toward a *statist* orientation, focusing on addressing working class demands through its participation in the tripartite alliance.

2.5 Perspectives on the rise of xenophobia in post-apartheid South Africa[13]

What has come to be called 'xenophobic attacks' in South Africa, in relation to the eruption of a particularly violent and widespread anti-migrants mobilization in May 2008, is only the most visible facet of a complex form of exclusion that foreign nationals have been experiencing and continue to experience on a daily basis. Violence and other forms of discrimination are often not contingent on whether the persons being attacked or discriminated against have the legal right to live in the country or work (Misago et al 2010).

The scale of the attacks on foreigners in May 2008 stimulated a wide debate in the press as well as in academia about the reasons for the violence. Among other explanations, the issue of a supposed "culture of violence" in the country was mentioned, as well as the problem of a widespread frustration toward poor services among workers and the poor and the 'economic threat' posed by migrant workers to nationals (Crush 2008; Steinberg 2008). It is undoubted that the South African historical background, together with present socio-economic conditions, have created a unique *tolerance* for violence but this element alone does not explain the ferocity of the events of May 2008. Fauvelle-Aymar and Segatti (2011) argue that three explanatory models emerged in the literature to explain the attacks:

1) The perpetrators' socioeconomic background, based on the assumption that from the point of view of the perpetrators of violence, perceived poor socio-economic

[13] For more details on anti-migrant sentiments and practices: Misago et al., 2009, 'Toward Tolerance, Law and Dignity, : Addressing Violence Against Foreign Nationals in South Africa'. Report for the International Organization for Migration, Pretoria; Misago et al., 2010, Violence Against Foreign National in South Africa: Understanding Causes and Evaluating Responses. FMSP Research Report. Johannesburg: ACMS; Neocosmos, M. 2006, From 'Foreign Natives' to 'Native Foreigners': Explaining Xenophobia in Post-apartheid South Africa'. Monograph, Council for the Development of Social Science Research In Africa, Dakar.

conditions compared with those of foreigners would represent the root of social instability (Gelb 2008; Pillay, 2008). Some scholars (e.g. Altman, 2008) point out structural employment due to a qualification gap between South Africans and foreign nationals as a specific explanation of frustration.

2) The tolerance threshold is based on the assumption, supported by opinion surveys (Crush et al., 2008), that anti-foreigners sentiments are extremely spread among South African citizens. This explanatory model would relate the eruption of violence to the density and visibility of immigrants in a determined area (Neocosmos, 2008).

3) Lack of capacity in local government has led to the emergence of local counter-powers that had created a state of patronage and clientelist access to economic resources. Phenomena of "popular justice" as a response to the absence of the State are not absolutely new in South Africa (Burman and Sharf, 1990) and the identification of "scapegoats" –foreigners in this case– can be an instrument in the hands of local leaders to reinforce their constituencies (Misago et al.2008; Steinberg, 2008).

As Fauvelle-Aymar and Segatti (2011) point out, it is still unclear whether any of these three explanations really reflects the dominant factor in the outburst of violence. Moreover, there is no explanation for why violence erupted in certain communities (often located in the same area) and not in others. Misago (2011) and Nieftagodien (2011) constitute exceptions, focusing Misago (2011) on authority and the micro-politics of violence and Nieftagodien (2011) on the historical roots of xenophobia in Alexandra Township.

Von Holdt (2011) stresses the struggle over the meaning of citizenship as an explanatory element of xenophobic violence. In the author's analysis community protest and xenophobic mobilisation are both part of a struggle over citizenship; subalterns, on one hand, protest against the elite by which they are excluded and on the other hand, 'engage in struggles to enforce a national citizenship regime through which they are defined as citizens with the right to lay claims to a redistribution of resources through the simultaneous exclusion of foreign nationals as non-citizens' (p.24). This view crosses the structural element of mass poverty and class formation, related to the perpetrators' socioeconomic background model and to the perceived inability of the state to provide services and, at the symbolic level, to impose a new order of citizenship –compatible with the local government capacity explanatory model identified by Fauvelle-Aymar and Segatti (2011).

According to the neoclassical economics approach (Hirshleifer 2001; Grossman 1991[14]), based on utility maximisation, efficiency and choices under conditions of scarcity, interprets the relationship between unemployment and participation in violence in developing countries as remarkably straightforward. Participation in xenophobic attacks, as well as in gangs or insurgent groups, is explained as a matter of rational choice, based on the economic *calculus* of costs and opportunities, which individuals make in a determined context. Therefore in the neoclassical economics perspective, the unemployed and the poor have a comparative advantage in participating in violence because they have "nothing to lose" in terms of income and position in the economy: "Those without access to legal, cooperative gainful employment were more likely to maximise their utility by recourse to violence and

[14] See Cramer 2011 for a detailed review of the literature on participation in violence and labour markets.

extortion"(Cramer 2011: 3). Therefore, participation in violence would always be related to material gains, typically obtained looting the victims. Labour, in this perspective, is conceived as any other commodity, thus exclusion from employment matters only because it implies the exclusion from the ability of purchasing goods or saving money. The non-pecuniary significance of employment, relational and symbolic, is nearly absent from this line of explanation.

As Fauvelle-Aymar and WaKabwe-Segatti's (2011) research demonstrates, the utility function of the rational choice approach fails to explain participation in xenophobic violence in South Africa. Poverty and unemployment characterize the society as a whole and are definitely important in understanding economic frustration. Nevertheless to make a straightforward causal relationship between factors like unemployment and participation in violence it is important to look at the specificity of the areas where xenophobic attacks occurred. Using the ward as a unit of analysis, the study looks at the characteristics of the areas affected by violence in May 2008. The authors find several important (sometime surprising) features, including:

- unemployment is not significantly correlated to the occurrence of the violence;

- there was no significant correlation between the violence and high levels of poverty;

- the eruption of violence was not directly proportional to the presence of foreigners.

The research however identifies the following variables as relevant: inequality between poor and intermediate income residents, high proportion of black residents (consistent with the high level of deprivation and violence that black South Africans experience), high proportion of male residents and the presence of informal dwellings and shacks. The research does not take into consideration the level of labour casualization, the precarious or even dreadful conditions in which those who say they are 'employed' find themselves. It therefore does not allow us to analyse neither the impact of the frustration of being under-employed (or precariously employed) nor the gap between expectations and job opportunities. Issues of local governance in the areas affected remain as well unexplored because these could not be measured from the study.

However, the issue of income inequality emerges as an important variable, partially confirming the 'perpetrators' socioeconomic background' explanation. At the same time, this finding is reflected in the widespread belief among South Africans that immigrants pose an 'economic threat' (Crush, 2008) because they 'steal jobs'. This assumption does not seem to be based on personal experience of losing one's job to a foreign national but it seems to be "relying mainly on hearsay, media and other representations" (Crush, 2008:4).

Nevertheless, such beliefs are prevalent among South Africans and it is considered one of the main causes of xenophobic sentiments. Interestingly, the literature records little xenophobic incident that occurred in workplaces in spite of the fact that the workplace can be the arena of intense interactions between South Africans and foreign nationals, Misago (2009) as an exception as he investigates anti-migrant violent mobilization in the agricultural sector in De Doorns, Western Cape.

Moreover, it could be expected that the workplace – beyond employment – is the prime locus of daily competition for access to economic and symbolic resources and therefore prone to witnessing clashes of interests around for example promotions, access to benefits and bonuses. In fact South African workers often accuse foreign co-workers of 'driving down wages and conditions', a belief that is supported by many management's claims that foreigners work 'harder for less' (Collins, 1998).

It is not clear – but of central interest to this research – if xenophobic accidents have occurred in workplaces but have not been reported or if, due to specific dynamics linked to the labour process or to workers' organizations, violence has been prevented from erupting in workplaces. Further empirical research needs to be carried out to assess it.

2.6 A changing economic structure

The South African labour market has undergone a major restructuring since the late 1980s, when firms started outsourcing *en masse* their operations, leading to a fragmented labour market characterised by a continuum between formal and informal employment

Von Holdt & Webster (2005), use the metaphor of an onion whose shrinking core is made of formal sector employees, in stable employment relations and who enjoy more or less stable wages, benefits and union rights; the zone in between is made of workers employed by subcontractors, or outsourced; the non-core workers have a less stable wage and labour relations which range from part-time contracts to daily employment; finally, in the periphery of the onion we find the most vulnerable workers who are not

employed and do not enjoy any of the benefits related to wage labour; they try to *make* a living as opposed as *earning* a living.

What was first a private sector phenomenon has spread to the public sector, from hospitals to schools (Pons-Vignon and Anseeuw, 2009). One of the few quantitative references on this issue is an article by Tregenna (2008) which shows that much of the growth in services employment observed in the 1990s and 2000s can, in fact, be attributed to an outsourcing transfer from manufacturing – and largely consists of cleaning and security services.

This restructuring is all the more striking as there were serious expectations built up during the struggle against apartheid and enshrined in law –e.g. the Labour Relation Act of 1995– that post-apartheid SA would evolve towards a Northern European style of industrial relations, with an active involvement of workers in company-level decision processes. Instead, casualization and worker disempowerment have been pervasive phenomena in the labour market, as documented in three key sectors, mining, forestry and agriculture, by Pons-Vignon and Anseeuw (*ibid*). This had of course been compounded by the permanently high level of unemployment – ranging between 25 and 40% depending on the definition used (Marais, 2011).

South African economy in the post-apartheid era is characterised by persisting poverty and increasing income inequality (Pillay, 2008), as well as by a growing trend toward the informalization of work. This last element has two components: the one accounted for in official statistics –Pillay (*ibid.*) underlies how statistics say that in 2004-05 of the 658,000 jobs created, 516,000 were in the so called informal economy, meaning small businesses that are not registered, self-employed workers and home

workers– and the other one invisible, made of informal wage labour within formal, registered business but under unstable contracts.

Von Holdt & Webster (2005) explain these trends as a general growing differentiation of the labour market due mainly to capital restructuring of South African companies into more globalised corporate and production structures. Capital restructuring often meant, in accordance with global trends, vertical disintegration of production, improvement in communication technology and externalization of non-core activities with major phenomena of outsourcing of the labour force. Pons-Vignon and Anseeuw (*ibid*) add a specifically South African element: 'Although international competition has certainly motivated productive reorganization, South African employers were equally influenced [...] by the fear of seeing yesterday's subordinate workforce demanding and exercising new rights to redress past wrongs' (p.897). This specificity is also highlighted by Bezuidenhout (2005) who argues that the oppression of the apartheid workplace regime is replaced by the flexibility of casual labour in the post-apartheid workplace, what he names 'continuity through change'.

In such a context of worsening of working and living conditions even the sphere of reproduction is affected and the symbolic value of work undermined. Yet persistent calls for further flexibilisation of the labour market arise (among others, Shussler, 2012) and appear quite ideological: they resemble more a class strategy by capitalists to further undermine labour than a reasonable solution to address issues of unemployment, under-employment and the precarious living conditions.

The international literature on labour migration highlights how the consequences of labour market restructuring may affect the symbolic value of work,

causing an impoverishment not only of material conditions, which often are worsened by processes of restructuring, but also undermining work identity (Cramer, 2011).

Moreover, it is pointed how the economic crisis creates increases in unemployment and layoffs and is generating, on one hand, resentment among some native workers who accuse migrant workers of 'stealing jobs' and, on the other hand, a tightening of control of borders by governments who try, in so doing, to demonstrate to the electorate that they are facing the crisis (Castles and Vezzoli, 2009). In some of the literature on xenophobia in South Africa the structural element of increasing redundancies[15] and toughening of the standard of living of millions of workers is addressed. For instance, Pillay (2008) suggests how the increase of inequality in post-apartheid South Africa causes a: 'perverse culture of entitlement and experiences of relative deprivation, which lie at the root of social instability' (p. 94).

Nevertheless, the literature is seldom based on empirical research; therefore, the way in which the worsening of living and working conditions of the majority interplays with anti-migrant sentiments -as well as the role of government in this dynamic, are assumed rather than explored. Also, recent changes in the composition of the labour market in relation to migration and the role of migrant workers in the post-apartheid neoliberal form of capital accumulation are not sufficiently investigated.

While it is important to avoid intellectual shortcuts, such as that xenophobia is produced by unemployment, it remains crucial to further investigate the upsurge in anti-migrants violence in relation to the economic structure, the global economic crisis and the restructuring of the labour market.

[15] Close to one million jobs were lost, between 2008 and 2009, in the wake of the global financial and economic crisis.

Although they are beyond the scope of this research, questions related to capitalist accumulation emerge as central in understanding anti-migrant mobilization, in particular: how have the complex forms of capitalist restructuring which have taken place globally since the late 1970s manifested themselves in South Africa? How South African specificity of transition from the white rule to democracy interplayed with globalization? What is the position of South African capital in the Southern African region? How do migrant serve the interest of capital accumulation in the country? Did their role change in post-apartheid South African capital accumulation?

2.6 Workers are also poor

The literature above, on the new composition of the labour market, provides us with a gloomy picture of the working and living conditions of many workers in the country. Nevertheless it is common in the mainstream media as well as in the literature to use separate categories (Shussler, 2012, Nattrass and Seekings, 2006), some times in conflict to one another to describe the workers and the poor; the theoretical perspective adopted in this report refers to workers as a class which includes different and shifting strata, including the unemployed and the unemployable, part of what Marx calls the army of labour (see section 2.2).

Consistent with the separation between workers and the poor there is widespread, if not explicit in academic debate, belief that workers, unlike the poor, have no reason to be xenophobic; this belief is based on a profit maximization train of thought, (see section 2.5) which suggests that since they have a job, would have more to lose than to win in engaging in anti-migrants practices. This assumption implies an

insulation of workers from the rest of society as a whole and from the rest of the working class, understood in Marxian terms.

The hypothesis that workers are unlike to adopt xenophobic practices may explain the fact that only a few studies explore the interaction between national and foreign workers in the workplace. This hypothesis however has been confuted by reports of violent actions undertaken by local workers against migrant workers in South Africa and abroad (Castles and Vezzoli, 2009; Misago 2009; my fieldwork).

Focusing only on the poor, in order to understand the violence may provide, at best, with a partial vision. The focus on the poor, in particular, mirrors a shift in the mainstream theories of development which since the 1980s focus on poverty rather than on the employment relation; the latter being a more inclusive concept because it embraces unemployment and partial employment and relates it to the form of accumulation whereas the concept of poverty tends to remove the poor from the structural economic context and to see their problem as an individual issue, to be overcome through their access to the market (Wuyts, 2001).

More generally, rigid dichotomies such as employed versus unemployed, formal sector versus informal sector workers might be misleading for understanding xenophobia, particularly from a labour perspective. Instead, we should look at the labour market as a whole. It is critical to see a continuum between who is currently working and who is not, firstly because of the casualised and precarious nature of the South African labour market and, secondly, because even the employees in the most formal of the meanings are often embedded in a social context of high unemployment and relative deprivation.

Workers often live in the same areas, if not under the same roof as the poor, may support their relatives, they are embedded in family and sometimes community-based networks of solidarity. Pons-Vignon and Anseeuw (2009) point out how a by-product of labour casualization, namely "the ability of the employed to save money for their family has been drastically reduced, affecting an important number of (often invisible) dependents and unemployed who rely on this support to survive" (p. 898). Hence the inaccuracy of the dichotomy and the relevance of looking at the working class as a whole when exploring the causes of violence among workers.

In the complexity of material life in townships and informal settlements, boundaries between different forms of employment are blurred and cannot be understood separately from each other. It is important to acknowledge differentiations in the labour market, e.g. the presence of the long-term unemployed, often unskilled and inexperienced, and therefore unemployable, without losing sight of the broader context.

The Marxian concept of the reserve army of labour –outlined in on section 2.5- may help in understanding the complexities of new forms of employment and new forms of poverty. Cerruti (2011) argues how even the so called under-class (the long-term unemployed) despite its actual distance from the labour market, shares with workers a general relation to exploitation; in other words, the point is not "whether they have sold their labour power or on what terms, but that they have nothing else to sell" (*ibid*, p 80). Workers and the unemployed are dependent on availing themselves for employment as the only means of reproduction, therefore they are materially part of a "community of fate" (Cerruti, 2011).

If those who are employed in a formal context tend to adopt anti-migrant practices in the workplace and in communities, this has not yet been explored. Although there is little evidence, thus far, of anti-migrant violence in workplaces, empirical investigation has to replace deterministic explanations, such as 'workers are not xenophobic' (Becker 1968, Hirshleifer 1994; 2001, Collier 2000). In any case South African workers who might co-operate with their foreign co-workers in the workplace live in communities which are highly affected by anti-foreign mobilizations[16].

[16] For instance, during my fieldwork, one of the interviewees (a South African factory worker) reported how he has tried, without success, to start a violent action against migrants in the workplace. The co-workers did not embrace his action, which actually ended with him being dismissed. Back in Ramaphosa the worker participated in the migrant hunting and in the night long patrolling of the area.

Chapter 3: the Context of the research and the Methodology adopted

This chapter will provide an overview of the context of the study and discuss the methodology adopted, as well as its relevance and weaknesses.

3. 1 The context

3.1.1 Ekurhuleni

According to the HSRC report on poverty pockets, (2005) the Johannesburg, Tshwane (Pretoria) and Ekurhuleni conurbation is probably the most attractive of any African cities. The presence of migrants from other provinces amounts approximately to 35% of the 8.8 million population of Gauteng, while 5% are foreign-born (Oosthuizen, Peberdy, et al. 2004). The 2001 Census shows that 65% of the 473,000 foreign nationals residing in Gauteng come from Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries.

Ekurhuleni corresponds to the area of Gauteng historically known as East Rand and/or Far East Rand. It is a metropolitan municipality constituted by the merger of several long-established towns (Rogerson, 2005): Alberton, Benoni, Germiston, Springs, Kempton Park , Edenvale, Nigel, Brakpan and Boksburg. Since the opening of the first coal mine at the end on 19th century, the region has represented a crucial arena in which the processes of industrialization and urbanization, and the social and political consequences thereof, unfolded (Nieftagodien, 2005). It was traditionally known as the manufacturing heartland of South Africa, peaking during the 1970s and then experiencing a decline in that sector in the 1980s and 1990s. Nevertheless, manufacturing as an employment sector has experienced growth between 1996 and

2001. This growth in employment is attracting low and semi-skilled job seekers to the area (SACN 2004).

Today the metropolitan municipality of Ekurhuleni still covers the largest concentration of industrial activity in South Africa and in all of sub-Saharan Africa (Machaka and Roberts, 2006), population growth has been expanding at an annual average rate of 4.12%, which is the highest growth rate recorded of all the six other South African metropolitan municipalities (South African Cities Network, 2004). However, the unemployment rate is higher than those recorded in other major urban centres, in 2002 the unemployment rate was 31.4% (South African Cities Network 2004).

The presence of foreigners in the area is relevant albeit uneven. During the May 2008 violence several wards in Ekurhuleni were affected by the violence. In the aftermath of the wave of violence the Gauteng Provincial Government declared Gauteng as a disaster area in terms of the Disaster Management Act and indicated Ekurhuleni as the most hit area in the Province.

The economic history of Ekurhuleni, its current industrial development, the level of unemployment, the presence of foreign workers, make this area a relevant site for research on the interaction between South African and foreign workers; the history of NUMSA in the area makes it a special place to observe the position of the union on issues related to xenophobia.

In May 2008, 88 of the 101 wards in the Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality have been affected by anti-migrant mobilization (Fauvelle-Aymar and Segatti, 2011). Nevertheless it has to be considered that anti-migrant mobilization had already been

registered in the area before the 2008's peak and it did continue afterward. In May 2011 local business owners, from Tembisa, Vosloorus, and Katlehong, supported by some residents, marched in Johannesburg against foreign shops owners in the area; again in November 2011 in other townships in the area, including Ramaphosa, foreign business owners have been threatened by South African business owners (Human Rights First, 2011).

3.1.2 The Marco Polo factory

Official data on the distribution of foreigners across different sectors of the South African economy is at best uneven. According to the Department of Labour (2007), the mining industry is still by far the first employer of migrants in South Africa with the 49% of migrants employed; the figure refers to legal migrants –people residing permanently in the country or having a temporary work permit. Comprehensive data on migrant workers in South Africa are inadequate. Polzer (2008) points out how studies on the employment of refugees and asylum seekers (CORMSA, 2007) "have been conducted separately from, on the one hand, discussions on 'skilled migrants' (Centre for Development and Enterprise, 2007) and, on the other, undocumented 'unskilled' migrants (Crush, 1997; Crush and Peberdy, 2004; International Federation for Human Rights, 2008, p.2)", leaving therefore the need for comprehensive data unmet.

However, in the case of my research, the identification of the sector to investigate was derived by the intersection of two elements: the presence of migrants and the research focus on the interaction between South African and foreign workers. In other words, observing sectors with a high presence of migrants though little unionized, such as the hospitality or security industries, would have not satisfied my research interest.

My interest in the alleged irrelevancy of xenophobic sentiments among workers and the role of the union in dealing with the interaction between South African and foreign workers is tightly linked to the process of casualization that the South African labour market underwent since the late 1980s. In these years "[f]lexibility and outsourcing of production facilitated a broad process of 'informalization' (...) driven by the restructuring of the formal sector rather than signalling the emergence of a separate sphere of production" (Barchiesi, 2006).

I wanted to observe the way South African-foreign national dynamics take place in the core of the South African economy, where the relatively most privileged workers are located and yet where processes of casualization and impoverishment of wage labour are rampant. Therefore it would not be relevant to the topic to look at the so-called informal sector (street vendors, home based workers, self-employed small entrepreneurs), where it is known that foreign workers are employed; on the contrary, I wanted to look at one of the sectors that constitute the bulk of South African capital accumulation, namely the mining and the metal industry.

Abundant literature is available on the interaction among mine workers where large part of the workforce has historically been made up of internal and external migrants. Although the literature on mining labour does not necessarily focus on xenophobic sentiments among the workforce it has produced a number of specialised scholar who would deal with this particular issue more thoroughly than I could do; therefore I decided to explore xenophobic sentiments in the workforce in the metal industry, a relatively less investigated sector, particularly from the point of view of social interaction. As explained above, the area of Ekurhuleni was identified as very critical because of its high level of industrialisation and because of the robust presence of migrants.

After discussions with researchers from the National Labour and Economic Development Institute (NALEDI) and from the African Centre for Migration and Society (ACMS) and unionists, from the South Africa Transport and Allied Workers Union (SATAWU), the Metal and Electric Workers Union of South Africa (MEWUSA) and NUMSA, the metals and engineering industry in Ekurhuleni emerged as an adequate place for fieldwork. Nevertheless, the process of identifying the factory proved difficult especially because of the scarcity of data on the distribution of foreigners in the industry. A second constraint was the accessibility to the factory, granted by NUMSA for obvious reasons only in factories where the union is active.

For political reasons the union does not register the nationality of its members, nor do the employers unless there are particular issues in relation to the work permit, e.g. lack of a regular permit; therefore a first round of interviews with union officials at the local level who know the industrial population of the area, was needed in order to identify the site of investigation.

The intercession of Alex Mashilo, Head of the Collective Bargaining and Organising Unit at NUMSA and alumnus of the Global Labour University Masters programmme, made the first contacts with NUMSA possible. After informal discussions with Meshack Robertson (Wits East regional organiser) and Thuso Nqubane (Ekurhuleni Legal organizer) the Marco Polo factory was identified as an appropriate research site for at least three reasons: firstly, the established presence of migrants employed – although NUMSA was unable to provide figures about the number of foreign workers employed by Marco Polo, union officials who had been involved in the factory confirmed their presence and spoke about them representing between 20 and 30% of the workforce; secondly because of the significant level of casualization of the workforce

– I found out that more than half of the workforce in Marco Polo was employed by a labour broker; lastly the Marco Polo factory was chosen on the basis of accessibility, through NUMSA, to the researcher.

Marco Polo is a Brazilian enterprise started in 1949 in Caxias do Sul, Rio Grande do Sul Province, as a passengers' carriers producer. Since 1971 it produces and assembles buses' bodies on chassis made by Mercedes-Benz, Scania and other big automakers. Today Marco Polo is the third largest manufactures in the world and it continues to geographically expand its production. The company also repairs vehicles and makes automotive parts. Its 12 plants, outside Brazil, are allocated in 8 countries in Central and South America (Mexico, Argentina and Colombia), Asia (India and China), Africa (Egypt and South Africa) and Australia. In 2000 the company started an operation in Germiston, Ekurhuleni, where it manufactures three different buses: Gran Viale, Andare Class and Torino. The Marco Polo Viale was used for the Rea Vaya contract, South African Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system, signed by Scania SA (Pty) in partnership with Marco Polo, with the City of Johannesburg in January 2009.

3.1.3 NUMSA in Ekurhuleni: between nationalism and solidarity

NUMSA was chosen not only because its large representativeness among South African metalworkers and for the pivotal role that the metal industry plays in South African capitalist accumulation but also because of the specificity of its history as a social movement union, in the East Rand and elsewhere (see Forrest, 2011; von Holdt, 2003; Mamdani 1996). In the 1980s, during the struggle for the transformation of the workplace and against apartheid, Ekurhuleni proved to be 'a laboratory for innovative forms of labour-community alliances and trade unions' engagement on the terrain of political mobilisation and broader social change' (Barchiesi, 2006). At the time, struggles

to challenge the workplace regimes were coupled with union support of community struggles, such as fighting against evictions of illegal dwellers in Katlehong (Rees, 1983 quoted in Barchiesi, 2006) or resisting the State's inclination toward private home ownership and the commodification of basic services. These struggle were politically but also strategically intertwined: eviction would have meant the dislocation of many migrant worker members of the union; the promotion of private home ownership was read as an attempt to co-opt better paid worker constituencies and therefore to undermine the labour movement and the unity of workers. Being a union member was geared toward structural change and class and race solidarity (Barchiesi 2006; von Holdt, 2003).

Von Holdt (2002) defines social movement unionism as 'a highly mobilized form of unionism that emerges in opposition to authoritarian regimes and repressive workplaces in newly industrialized countries of the developing world' (p. 285). According to this view, shared by many scholars including Barchiesi (2006) and Buhlungu (2001), social movement unionism did not survive the collapse of the apartheid regime because of a complex set of pressures coming from the new position of organized labour as part of the ruling alliance, labour market casualization and further commodification of services. These pressures challenge the role of the union as representative of the community but also the work identity of the now highly fragmented workforce. Von Holdt (2001) speaks in this regard about the erosion of solidarity along new and old lines, newly spread divisions based on nationality may be understood as such.

However, as a unique representative of social movement union tradition, NUMSA is expected, and in fact it claims to have a say on workers struggles beyond the

workplace. COSATU's affiliates argued that the union structures played a pivotal role in curbing xenophobia in the workplaces (Hlatshwayo, 2010); this statement mirrors the apparent absence of anti-migrant mobilisation in the workplace, even in the highly tense area of Ekurhuleni. NUMSA is the largest union in the area[17]; it is therefore crucial to investigate what role it played in violence prevention and more generally, to inquire how it relates to South African- foreign worker interaction.

3.2 Methodology

3.2.1 Documentary sources

Beside original data collection the research includes the consultation and analysis of NUMSA policy documents, resolutions and public statements as well as union reports on issues related to xenophobia, organizing migrants and international solidarity. Union's campaign on xenophobia and the relative documentation have also been analysed.

3.2.2 Fieldwork

Preliminary research and key informants

I started conducting fieldwork in Ekurhuleni in the last quarter of 2011 with visits to the Municipality to request access to data available on the presence of foreign nationals in the area. The response from the officials was that such data did not exist; this had a direct implication on the methodology chosen for the research (see below).

[17] In April 2012, the Ekurhuleni congress was attended by 443 shopstewards representing 51197 members (see http://numsa.org.za/article/numsa-ekurhuleni-regional-congress-declaration-2012-04-21).

Informal discussions with NUMSA officials were also initiated, first with national then provincial and local cadres. In the same period, interviews with key informants were conducted to investigate the history of NUMSA in relation to foreign workers; questions about the acknowledgement and in fact the existence of an issue of xenophobia in the history of NUMSA were asked. Discussions with key informants also aimed to collect information on the role of foreign nationals in the South African labour movement and in NUMSA in particular. These key informants are Kally Forrest and Karl von Holdt, who are recognized specialists of the history of the South African trade union movement and particularly of NUMSA[18]. The informants were not direct members of the group being studied (metal workers and NUMSA officials), but have been associated with the South African labour movement (both were, for instance, editors of the *South African Labour Bulletin*). Their expertise and historical knowledge mean that they were well versed in the social phenomena being explored and they have been very helpful in constructing a rich understanding of the study issue (Rubin & Babbie, 2010).

Interviews and participatory observation

The research focuses on the interaction between workers from different national backgrounds, the position of foreign workers in the workplace and the role played by the trade union in relation to this interaction. In order to investigate the topic, qualitative research was identified as the best-suited method, because of the impossibility to access data from local authorities, and because of the broader scarcity of reliable data on migrants (Segatti, 2011). Further, even a factory-level quantification of migrants proved impossible after the Head of Human Resources asserted that no

[18] Forrest (2011) and von Holdt (2003); these monographs are cornerstones of the South African labour history and both focus on NUMSA.

migrants were working in the factory – a declaration certainly reflecting a 'hiding' strategy (see Chapter 4), since many foreign workers were subsequently interviewed. The research method chosen suits the exploration of the interactions relevant to the topic, but also attempts to recognise nuances of attitudes and behaviour that might have escaped researchers using other methods, like self-administered questionnaires or interview surveys (Rubin & Babbie, 2010). Qualitative research drawing on interviews thus offers more depth, even if it lacks in breadth. It is therefore hoped that this research can be a stepping stone informing subsequent quantitative explorations of this issue.

The core of the fieldwork was conducted from the last quarter of 2011 to March 2012. It took place, as much as it was possible, directly in the social environment in which social interactions of interest to the topic occur, namely the workplace, the union offices and to a lesser extent in communities. I unfortunately only managed to get access to the factory once because of restraints put in place by management on the ground that investigation – even if conducted by an MA student – may jeopardize their competitiveness because of the risk of industrial espionage. Nevertheless, and thanks to the support of NUMSA, I managed to start informal discussions with the workers. Because of the difficulty in conducting interviews in the workplace, some of the workers suggested to carry them out at their houses. I agreed and thus most of the interviews took place at the workers' private residences, mostly located in different sections of Katlehong, Reiger Park, Tembisa but also in Germiston.

Despite the disappointment with my incapacity to explore the factory, the home-based interviews turned out to be a way to enrich the discussions greatly. I believe that in general the workers felt relatively free to speak openly about problems at work with management and with co-workers, and about NUMSA. The 'good spirit' that permeated

most – though not all – of the interviews probably relates to the fact that they were conducted in a comfortable environment both for the informants and for the researcher, away from possible interference coming from the presence of co-workers, trade unionists or management.

Moreover, seeing the place of residence of the workers gave me a concrete sense of their daily challenges in communities, which I refer to as reproductive challenges. Challenges may differ substantially and are not simply a function of income levels. For instance, it may happen that even with a decent salary foreign workers cannot afford a dwelling with running water and electricity, unlike their South Africans colleagues, because of the danger associated with living in a so-called 'privileged' residence as a foreign national in a South African township. On the other hand, living in the city, either Johannesburg or Germiston, is unaffordable for most workers. Therefore, the daily reproductive challenges vary substantially and they range from lack of or insufficient basic services, distance from means of transport, lack of infrastructure and in two cases (interestingly the two workers from Mozambique) overcrowding and lack of running water.

I also proceeded with participating in the Germiston shop steward meetings, which take place every week at the NUMSA local office, and carried out several informal discussions with workers and union officials. These discussions paved the way for 19 in-depth semi-structured interviews, 12 with workers and 7 with NUMSA union officials. For reasons of security, given the sensitivity of the topic researched, all names of workers interviewed have been changed (but their real names have been shared with the supervisor and stored in a secure file).

I also conducted 'on site' observation of union meetings and informal gatherings. The observation provided the researcher with a deeper insight of workers' interaction and union priorities at the local level. I attended three local shopsteward meetings where NUMSA shopstewards from Germiston meet to discuss among them and with the local organizer (himself a metal worker) the most important grievances. Between 5 and 15 shopstewards were meeting when I attended.

Sampling

The research was conducted in a situation that did not allow probability samples not only because, as social research often does, it investigates social interactions, perceptions and subjective disposition; in addition in the case of this particular social research there was an element of sensitivity in the topic explored that made the individuation of willing respondents more difficult. This element was not obvious to the researcher before the research has begun and relates to the very fact that the social issue explored is not yet widely acknowledged and there is significant denialism on one hand and tendency to hide on the other (Lee, 1993). In other words, potential informants have incentive to conceal their identity, for instance in the case of foreign workers, in order to protect themselves from possible retaliation generated by not yet acknowledged discrimination. Therefore a snowball sampling technique was adopted in the attempt of locating both South African and foreign employees and including unionized as well as non-unionized workers; an attempt of keeping a gender balance was also made with satisfactory results in relation to a mainly male population.

'The snowball refers to the process of accumulation as each located subject suggests other subjects' (Rubin & Babbie, 2010: 193). My firsts contacts were made

through NUMSA with unionised workers and thanks to their cooperation and sometimes efforts to go out from their closest circle of friends in the factory, I managed to interview a quite heterogeneous group of workers.

Interviews

In-depth interviews with unionised and non-unionised workers have been conducted to analyse the specific interaction that takes place among South Africans and foreigners in the workplace. Interactions in communities were also considered but time and resources constraints made the observation in communities not possible.

Table 1: Interviews with workers

Name	Date of the interview	Position/Department	Gender	Place of origin	Employer	Union affiliation
Michael	18 Nov 2011	Shopsteward	M	Former Ciskei	MP	NUMSA
David	18 Nov 2011	Shopsteward/ Fibreglass repair	M	Limpopo	Labour broker	NUMSA
Lerato	24 Nov 2011	Final finishing	F	Katlehong		
Nongqawuse	24 Nov 2011	Runner/Erection	F	Katlehong	Labour broker	NUMSA
Gloria	24 Nov 2011	Cleaner/ Management office	F	Free State	N/A	None
Rapula	26 Nov 2011	Welder/Erection	M	Free State		None
Christiano	26 Nov 2011	Installs	M	Mozambique	Labour broker	NUMSA
Carlos	20 Jan 2012	Welder	M	Mozambique	Labour broker	NUMSA
Weizman	20 Jan 2012	Body repairer/ Refurbishment	M	Reiger Park		NUMSA
Tom	04 Feb 2012	Electrician/refurbishment	M	Zimbabwe	Labour broker	NUMSA
Charity	05 Feb 2012	Technician/Refurbishment	M	Zimbabwe		NUMSA
Simon	27 March 2012	Welder but no longer working at MP	M	Umthata		None

The semi-structured in-depth interviews with the workers aimed to explore the following topics:

- Workers' perception of the *outsider* in the workplace;
- Workers' perception of the *outsider* in communities;
- Competition in the workplace on wage and non-wage benefits;
- The meaning of being South African (or non SA);
- Union mediation of workers' perceptions and experiences;
- Democracy in the workplace.

Informal discussions and in-depth interviews to union officials at the national, provincial and local level were conducted in order to better understand the position of the union toward xenophobia and its role toward the interaction between South African and foreign workers. The role of the union in communities was also explored.

The semi-structured in-depth interviews with NUMSA officials aimed to explore the following topics:

- NUMSA's policy in relation to international solidarity;
- NUMSA's official position toward xenophobia and its roots;
- Implementation of policies (e.g. education programmes, campaigns etc.);
- Workplace practices.

Table 2: Interviews with union officials

Name	Date	Position
Alex Mashilo	Many, starting in September 2011 until March 2012	Head of the collective bargaining
Meshack Robertson	10 November 2011	Wits East regional organizer
Thuso Nqubane	Many, starting on15 Nov 2011 until March 2012	Ekurhuleni Legal organizer
George Chosane	10 Jan 2012	Regional Secretary
Skumbuzo	27 March 2012	International office
Hlokoza Motau	27 March 2012	Head of the International office
Nelson	15 March 2012	Germiston Local organizer

3.3 Ethical considerations

The interaction between South Africans and migrants is a highly subjective and sensitive topic and needed a careful approach to design the set of open-ended questions I wanted to ask and to interact with the subjects of the interviews. As a non-South African white researcher my position was delicate firstly because of the suspicion that a white person posing questions to black workers may always cause; secondarily because I did not speak any African language; and thirdly because I am not part of the harsh reality that some of the interviewees are embedded in. In order to overcome or at least to alleviate these sets of problems I spent time with the respondents explaining to them who I am and why I am interested in studying xenophobia in South Africa before introducing the topic of the research. I allowed the workers to ask questions not only on

the research but also on my personal interest because I had the feeling that it was curious for them to be interviewed for purposes that are neither security nor employment related.

I am a visiting scholar at the ACMS and through my work and discussions with researchers that have a long experience in the area of migration and xenophobia, I developed the necessary tools to interact with potentially vulnerable subjects in a manner that would protect my safety and their interest.

During the fieldwork I interviewed three people who have been victims of xenophobic violence, as well as one perpetrator. The issue of confidentiality of our exchange was particularly important in these cases.

In order to protect the interest and the safety of the interviewees several criteria have been respected. In particular:

- The aim of the research was explained before starting the interview;

- No sensitive information about the interviewee was recorded –including name, address, and contact details;

- The use of tape recorder was not hidden or imposed but discussed and decided with the interviewee. In case of rejection (which happened twice), the interviewer only took notes of the discussion.

- The privacy, dignity and wishes of the informants always came first.

3.4 Limitations of the study

The study was limited firstly by time and resources constraints. Moreover the study should ideally be broadened and include quantitative research to assess the percentage of foreign workers in the area investigated, their experience of discrimination based on nationality and their experience with the trade unions. This information goes beyond the possibilities of my study. Moreover, during my fieldwork I realized how useful could be ethnographic research methods to extend my investigation deeper in communities. It would be interesting to the topic to follow the personal linkages among workers of different nationalities beyond the workplace; also it would be very relevant to observe the role of unionists –from the shopstewards to the Regional Secretary- in communities through consistent observation of community meetings and informal gatherings. This strain of investigation emerged as not sustainable in the context of a MA research report because of time and resources constraints.

Chapter 4: Findings and analysis

This chapter will proceed with the description and analysis of the main findings collected through the interaction with workers and unionists. It starts with an account of general findings and proceeds with an analysis of more specific findings on workers' perceptions of co-workers of different nationalities, in particular inside the factory, and workers' perceptions of the role of the union in mediating this interaction.

4.1 General findings

This section focuses on information on the context of the research acquired through observation and clarified through discussions with workers. Findings are general because they do not refer to the interaction between workers of different nationalities but help build a more detailed empirical context in which these interactions take place.

4.1.1 Two unions

NUMSA has 250 members in Marco Polo, out of 466 workers. An independent union, which is active in the metal industry in Ekurhuleni, the General Industries Workers Union of South Africa (GIWUSA), has also members in the factory. This union was formed as a result of a split in COSATU in the late 1990s around the centrality of working toward a mass workers' party, as opposed to the ANC. GIWUSA is known among workers to be a radical union. Although Micheal, one of the NUMSA shopstewards, expressed uncertainty about the need for another union in the first place ("I don't understand why they formed another union because we can't complain about

NUMSA"[19]), most workers seem to consider it to be as important as NUMSA in the factory. For instance, when talking about negotiations over retrenchments, Lerato explained that "NUMSA tries to protect the members but sometimes management says 50% - 50% with GIWUSA because they have the right to protect their members too. That's what they [NUMSA officials] say"[20].

It was not possible, because of time constraints, to discuss issues of xenophobia with GIWUSA officials and members, although it would have been interesting to find out if strategies or behaviours differ from those of NUMSA. Further research should include a comparison of the two unions active in the area and their membership.

4.1.2 The Germiston shopsteward meetings are not about migrants

As opposed to 2008, when xenophobic violence was at its peak and workers were discussing it constantly (as it will be explained below), currently in shopsteward meetings, the issue of anti-migrants mobilization is not considered as a relevant problem; the meetings usually focus on issues around working conditions. The most commonly discussed issues I observed were: retrenchments due to an alleged shrinking of the production orders – motivation frequently provided by management; individual dismissals - sometimes considered as unfair by the shopsteward committee and therefore referred to the provincial office; unpaid over-work.

Communications from the national or the provincial office are also often discussed. These usually regard NUMSA activities, campaigns and the preparation for

[19] Interview, South African male respondent, 18th November, NUMSA local office, Germiston.
[20] Interview, South African female respondent, 20th November 2011, interviewee's private house, RDP house, Tsolo sec. Katlehong.

the ninth NUMSA congress that took place from the 4th to the 8th of June 2012. Particularly relevant to the topic explored was one of the communications from the national office; it informed the members about the proposed shift in the international affiliation of COSATU from ITUC (International Trade Union Confederation) to the WFTU (World Federation of Trade Unions). NUMSA, together with other COSATU affiliates, including NEHAWU and POPCRU, is already affiliated to the WFTU and strongly supports the shift and justifies it as a move towards the strengthening of international workers solidarity.

4.1. 3 Labour brokering belongs to the past

In 2010, after collecting many complaints by Marco Polo workers for ill-treatment by the labour brokers (TEC[21]), the NUMSA regional office and in particular the regional legal organiser Thuso Nqubane submitted the demands of the union to the company directors. Demands included the implementation of decent work standard in the factory; the employment of all workers directly by the company; and the banning of the labour brokers from the Marco Polo factory from then onwards. It has to be noted that 344 of the 460 workers operating in the factory were employed by the labour broker and subjected to high levels of pressures, under the threat that their contract would expire the month after and that renewal was not guaranteed.

Most of the workers had been working under these conditions from 2003 until the end of 2011, when the company accepted union demands and informed workers that the labour broker would no longer operate at Marco Polo SA and the entire

[21] TEC is the labour broker that has been operating in Marco Polo since 2006 when it replaced the previous one, IBUMBA. Interestingly, the owner of TEC, Tanya Best, was the head of Human resources at Marco Polo.

workforce employed by TEC would be transferred to Marco Polo on permanent contracts with all the benefits related to the status. This represented a substantial victory for the union, as the sense of precariousness among workers was a central grievance, reflected in many of the interviews carried out (see below).

4. 2 Specific findings

In-depth interviews with workers included 12 employees, of which three were shopstewards, three women, four migrants (from Zimbabwe and Mozambique) and one who took part in anti-migrant mobilization in the context of the 2008 climax of violence in the area. Nine of the 12 workers I interviewed are members of NUMSA; the others declared not to be unionised.

In order to capture workers' perceptions of a sensitive issue such as xenophobia in the workplace in all its complexity, questions were broken down and asked from different points of views. The different angles included:

- main grievances at work and in communities;
- main channels to address the problems in the workplace and in communities;
- interpretations of migration and anti-migrant sentiments and mobilization;
- NUMSA's role in addressing the main problems in the workplace and in communities;
- perceptions of democracy in the workplace;
- reflections on the meaning of the 'new' South-Africa.

As expected, the most salient points about the interaction among South African and foreign workers in communities as well as in the factory came from indirect

questions more than from the blunt: “how do you get along with your colleagues?” to which the answer was usually: “very well, thanks.”

Moreover, the analysis of the data collected revealed several unexpected common themes such as:

- perception of precariousness;
- a xenophobic climate surrounding workers’ lives– most of the workers spoke about experiences of xenophobia either as victims, witnesses or perpetrators (Landau/Misago);
- ‘hiding’ behaviour by foreigners (including management strategies to deal with competition among workers of different nationalities);
- a gap between the shopstewards and other workers’ political understanding of conflict, migration and solidarity and in relation to the role played by workers in communities.

I processed the results of the qualitative research conducted with the workers using an inductive method of analysis, thus I organized the findings according to the themes that emerged and not with the ones set *a priori*.

4.2.1 Perceptions of precariousness

The workers interviewed seem to live in a constant sense of precariousness because of the nature of their contract with the labour broker and because they are regularly told that production is not going well at Marco Polo. After the boom of demand for buses for the World Cup and for the Rea Vaya, there has apparently been a constant drop in production. Rapula says: "Every year [there are] retrenchments, short time… even now, most of us is only working 4 days. You don't know why. And I don't believe they don't have orders." On the same tone, Nkululeko adds: "They retrench every year because, they say, production doesn't go. The people retrenched are from everywhere. You never know if next time [it] is going to be you". It seems that in this issue of retrenchments or non renewal of contract, workers feel they have no information whatsoever to understand production cycles because it often happens that even if the factory overall is producing on a sustained basis, there are nonetheless retrenchments. This is an issue about which even the union does not seem to have satisfactory information, as Lerato, among others, points out: "NUMSA and the shopstewards try to deal with that. Sometimes they come to say: everything is going to be all right but then there are retrenchments and they just say: there's nothing we can do to stop it because there is no production."

In the sphere of reproduction, the fact that most services are privatized represents a further burden and source of anxiety, as pointed out by Barchiesi (2007) who refers to the increasing pressures linked to commodification. Most of the workers complain particularly about the high cost of electricity and unreliability and cost of transport. Crime is also a major concern, especially for foreign nationals but also for South African workers. There are substantial variations in terms of safety and services

provided in the different areas where workers live; it seems that some sections of Katlehong have been revamped while others not. Reiger Park and Ramaphosa are described as very problematic areas, where "violence and poverty rule" as Weizman puts it.

In terms of housing, conditions are very mixed: two of the workers I interviewed live in a gated community in Germiston, all the others are based in townships. Only 3 of them live in RDP houses, the others built their accommodation with bricks, while at least three live in shacks located in someone's yard.

The problem with wage usually is not only the amount of money they earn *per se,* but the fact that the wage of every single worker supports at least three or four other members of the family who are unemployed and not eligible for any social grant. Lerato, for instance, was studying towards matric when her mother died 6 years ago and with her the only source of income of the family disappeared. Lerato started working for the labour broker at Marco Polo four years ago and every 6 months she gets very stressed because she does not have any guarantee of been re-employed. "If I work there is no problem, I manage to pay for services but if I don't there is [a] problem because I'm the only one working among 7 people. I'm the last born and there is only one grant for the all family [for her new-born nephew]".

4.2.2 A Xenophobic Climate

In the community

The qualitative research conducted with the Marco Polo factory workers reveals that the 'generalised intense xenophobic climate[22]' Landau (2011) refers to, does not stop at the gate of the workplace. Marco Polo, as well as other factories I collected information about, as explained below, is embedded in a climate where foreigners tend to be identified as the main threat to a fair access to housing and social services by the locals, a vehicle of HIV/AIDS, an engine of moral corruption, the primary cause of crime in general and obviously an economic threat in the labour market because they would be ready to work for anything (see, among others, Landau, 2011, Polzer, 2012 and Neocosmos, 2006). This climate of xenophobia is not made only of perceptions, often shaped by the state and disseminated by media, but also of direct experiences of xenophobic violence. All the workers interviewed are somehow familiar with the concept and the reality of xenophobic mobilization, either as witnesses, victims or perpetrators.

As expected, most of the accounts of violence refer to communities and make the foreign workers permanently worried for their properties but also for their physical integrity, especially in townships. As Tom, a technician from Zimbabwe says:

> "Me, I don't like staying in these highly dense suburbs. If I can afford to stay peaceful, I'll do that. It's bad being in a location if you are a foreigner. With the other guys of the hood you have got to be nice, give them money

[22] Landau (2011) refers to a mainstream discourse that links mobility and the outsider with a threat to the wellbeing of the nation. In this context foreign nationals lives 'parallel those of the apartheid-era black labourers: omnipresent and economically active but still stigmatised and vulnerable to the whims of neighbour and state' (p. 8).

> for beer, just trying to please them. If you do it they will respect you. But the time you don't do that, it becomes impossible. You can't stock your stuff in your own place because they would break in if you're in a location. It would be a waste."

This point is shared by all the foreign workers I interviewed, since all of them experienced several robberies, break-ins and looting. Most of them though cannot afford to move out of townships and have no choice but to try to put in place strategies like 'hiding' or exchanging material goods with their neighbours for safety – a provisional measure without guarantees.

Three of the workers were also attacked physically because they were foreigners: Carlos and Charity in 2008 during the climax of xenophobic violence in Katlehong, and Christiano at the beginning of 2011, in the same location. Christiano said that he got a bonus from the employer and used it to buy appliances to send to Mozambique but on the way back from the shop someone saw him and followed him. He was attacked by four people and robbed of all his belongings and the new goods. Afterwards he had to spend two weeks in hospital to recover from the injuries.

All the workers who have been victimised as foreigners report that, although they received *ad hoc* support from the shopstewards, they were not formally helped by the union, nor are they aware of any processes in place at NUMSA to deal with xenophobic violence. Christiano received 350 rands, collected by the shopsteward in the factory from co-workers to help him recovering. When asked if he reported the aggression he experienced to NUMSA, Charity responded:

> "No, I'm not sure if I'm supposed to do it, if it is in their constitution or not. They don't intervene on these issues. They come with feedbacks about retrenchments, short time but for these other problems they don't."

The South African interviewees as witnesses or participants in violence also reported xenophobic mobilization in communities. Most of them declare to be against violence but some explained that the problems that led to violence are real. For instance, Rapula said that:

> "With me, we South Africans have to be first priority for housing, jobs. Now we're on the same level, in fact workers from outside seem to have more opportunity because they're desperate and they accept everything. But I don't like the violence. We have to go to our government and ask to come first. Usually when you see a person from outside the day after [he] is working because they accept everything."

NUMSA's role in communities seems to be highly uneven. Foreigners do not seem to rely on the union even if they know that it officially condemns xenophobia. Some of the workers report an active role of individual shop stewards in community meetings; it appears that there are attempts, not always successful, to mediate the interests of the locals with those of foreigners. This extends to mediating the interest of a group of business owners with the interests of the residents and the foreign shop owners (for instance when the latter offer lower prices). Nkululeko explains that in Ncala section in Katlehong, a community committee voted on the presence of foreign owned shops in the area and decided not to allow them. She reports that on this occasion, the individual unionists tried to play an active role in conveying to people that excluding foreigners from business was not the right way to fight unemployment:

"NUMSA and particularly SATAWU participate too much in these meetings. They tried to convince people when they were deciding about the Indians but they weren't listening"[23].

In the workplace

Particularly relevant to the topic explored is mobilization in the workplace which, I encountered in three different instances:

- The owner of a small-sized enterprise based in Germiston dealing with marble and granite – Marmernova – where the union is not present, told me of an attack organized in 2009. According to the owner, tensions along national lines in his 25-employee factory increased in the past 5 years and broke out in an attack organized by South African workers against a co-worker from Zimbabwe. A large sheet of marble was thrown at the worker, after which the perpetrators tried to claim it was an accident. The worker was severely injured and, while he regretted the incident, the owner neither reported to the police, nor took any disciplinary actions.
- In 2009, hundreds of employees of the Union Carriage and Wagon (UCW) marched to the company asking for management to retrench foreign workers. This event was reported to me by Hlokoza Motau, Head of the International office at NUMSA and confirmed by the NUMSA local organizer. Apparently the action involved great numbers of workers and required the intervention of the national office in the person of the General Secretary of NUMSA to be stopped.

[23] During the interview I realized that Nonqawuse refers to Somali and Pakistani nationals as Indians.

- In 2011 in a factory called Hendred Fruehauf, a truck manufacturer in Germiston, an anti-migrant mobilization was organized by a group of workers lamenting the spread of bribery allegedly done by foreigners in order to access to promotions and permanent positions. I spoke with one of the organizers of the mobilization, Simon a former Marco Polo employee. He explained that:

> "In the place of work the only thing that causes the violence is that foreigners would go for anything that is set on the table. In Hendred half of the workforce is foreigner and the team-leader who's Indian [South African Indian] says that it is because we, South Africans, are lazy but I'm not lazy. The foreigners bribe the team-leader to get registered (getting a permanent position). I saw him getting bribed from them but the problem is that I couldn't prove it. I reported it to the shopsteward but he couldn't do anything. We tried to organize a strike against the bribery of the foreigners but instead I got fired, the union didn't do anything to support me."

Anti-migrant mobilization is not absent from workplaces as these cases demonstrate. However, it seems that in many cases violence is kept under check and that the union, through the mediation of shop stewards at the factory level or the intervention of the local, regional or even national officials – in the most thorny situations – has a great impact on the process of violence containment.

The positive role of individual unionists in defusing violence is demonstrated by at least three pieces of information acquired through the interviews: the daily work shopstewards claim to do at Marco Polo to bridge the national divide among the workforce; the intervention and mediation of the Ekurhuleni regional office and even of the General Secretary of NUMSA to deal with the anti-migrant mobilization at the UCW in Nigel; the fact that at Marmernova, where NUMSA is absent, violence exploded in a

virulent way, through an attempt of killing a Zimbabwean worker and depicting the action as an accident.

Having illuminated the union role in the xenophobic mobilizations above mentioned, further research, both quantitative and qualitative, would be necessary to firstly quantify anti-migrant mobilization in Ekurhuleni and, secondly, to understand the dynamic of the actions through interviews with the workers involved, and also to explore further the role of NUMSA in defusing violence in the area.

4.2. 4 Shopstewards as holders of class consciousness?

The shop stewards, unlike the majority of the other interviewees, tend to draw on class identity to make sense of competition in the factory among workers and between workers and management. For instance, when asked about the workers' main grievances, David stated: "The problem in Marco Polo is that we're always looking for money. You expect the owner of the company to think about the workers? They don't, unless they're challenged from us. Then our main concern as shopstewards is to challenge them.[24]"

A striking feature of the workplace regime in Marco Polo, also understood in class terms, was the rigidity of social mobility, which allows the employer to draw on (informally) qualified workers without paying them accordingly. Thus, the factory does not invest in workers' education, it exploits workers' weaknesses in terms of education instead of addressing them to enhance productivity. This was eloquently captured by this comment by Weizman, formally a cleaner and a shopsteward:

[24] Interview, South African male respondent, 18th November, NUMSA local office, Germiston.

"I started in Marco Polo in September 2007. (…) I started as a cleaner with a very low salary but I lifted myself up learning all of sorts of things. If you get in as a cleaner you have the right to a promotion like everyone; so in my case I learned how to do electrical and I want to become an electrical assistant. (…) They want papers to promote you but for me to get papers as an electrician I need matric and they know I don't have it. They use the fact you don't have matric to put you in a corner. So now they use the knowledge I acquired to be an electrician but they pay me as a cleaner. You see? I didn't find it right because at work there is this guy, he's my best friend, Robert, he's from Zimbabwe and he's a technician; he teaches me everything: I can fix the seats, putting dashboards, electrical assistant…but Marco Polo doesn't recognize it only exploits it. So Marco Polo is a company that oppresses people, they oppress the workers. That's how I started wondering on how things work in a factory, what kind of law I can use to defend myself, how to engage myself. Now I know that because of the oppression in the factory it's not easy to get up the ladder. Particularly if you come from a poor community or family they [the company] will use it to blackmail you. I went deeply into this thing and that's why I got interested in NUMSA and became a shopsteward. So I went to the general meeting with management and I stood up; I made my issue part of their agenda (…) As a shopsteward I try to help out my colleagues according to the law and to what I learned"[25].

In relation to migration and anti-migrant sentiments, the shopstewards show a higher level of political education compared with other workers. After the 2008 anti-migrant violence, they have been involved in workshops, organised at the local level of the union, on xenophobia. It emerges that even if not always thoroughly planned and implemented, the attempts made by the union to raise the shop stewards' awareness around the fragmenting impact of xenophobia on workers' unity have made a difference in the way they relate to the national divide within the factory and beyond. They reported to always trying of defuse xenophobic sentiments among the workforce when

[25] Interview, South African male respondent, 30th of January 2012, Ramaphosa –interview took place in the car as the informant didn't feel like accessing his place with me.

it comes to promotions and training, for which some of the foreign employees have more opportunities because of their higher skills.

Moreover two of the shopstewards interviewed are actively fighting xenophobia in communities. Both of them were pointing out how political organization can play a role in defusing violence. Talking about problems related to an overcrowded shantytown in Tembisa, Micheal explained that:

> "Most of them are foreigners and we cooperate with them. They come to the general community meetings. Now we're even busy talking to the councillor to get houses for them. We are organised. We sit down and discuss in order to avoid violence because if there is violence, investors won't come. In my area there has not been violence because we are organised, every Wednesday we have a community meeting in Phomolong. There, we discuss how to deal with crime. We even invite the police because there are too many robberies. We don't like discrimination against foreigners, we explain to people that we must have evidence if we accuse someone, we cannot be based on rumours".

The third shopsteward is very active in the workplace addressing anti-migrant sentiments, which they argue, are present. However, he does not participate in community meetings, due to an alleged racial divide in Ramaphosa; so far, he felt scared to participating in community meetings; he is a coloured, originally from Reiger Park who relocated to a shack in Ramaphosa (a mainly African area) when the grandmother died and he could no longer afford the rent that was previously covered by the grandmother pension.

Class identity, often intertwined with other sets of identity, is used by the shopstewards to reflect on anti-migrant mobilisation in communities. In different

occasions the shopstewards draw on popular identity to strengthen solidarity among workers and with foreigners, both at work and in communities.

Drawing on popular identity to build collective solidarity is not a new feature of the history of NUMSA; von Holdt (2002) explains how the union started recruiting in hostels among migrant workers from the homelands and from neighbouring countries. Among them, Pedi migrant workers constituted an important block of members and shopstewards, throughout the 1980s. Pedi workers drew on their culture of male discipline and collective solidarity and used it to strengthen the union structures and to build solidarity.

Micheal, a former Christian pastor and a labour broker employee for Marco Polo since 2003, shifts from politics to religion to clarify the need of building solidarity in the community:

> "In 2008 we had violence in the squatter camp and we asked why. The problem is lack of communication. I spoke with some of the perpetrators of violence and asked: what did Jesus say about your neighbours? They are your neighbours. They look for house and jobs like you but they're more skilled, right, but they are still your neighbours. Also I explained that many of our comrades during apartheid were hosted in neighbouring countries. They must cooperate with them not chase them away".

This finding relates to the concept of overlapping sets of identities explored in paragraph 2.2. Workers identity is neither exclusive nor static and it includes class, national, ethnic and even religious elements. The way the different elements relate and prevail one over the others responds to the political and economic structure as well as to the inputs coming from workers' leaders (Anthony Marx, 1992), the trade union leadership in the case of organized workers.

Overall, the finding confirms what was reported by union officials: that shop stewards have been exposed to political education both in general and in particular around issues related to foreign workers and integration.

The fact that most of the other workers – non shopstewards – interviewed show generally a less deep understanding of class conflict and class solidarity may be explained by a lack of spilling over the information from the union structure to the shop floor. It emerges that education on xenophobia has not been at the centre of the union concerns but that at the local level, as well as through general statements at the national level, some action was taken, particularly after the 2008 attacks. The interpretation of the shopstewards of anti-migrant mobilization does not seem to be grounded on a deep and comprehensive understanding of migration nor on clear notions of class solidarity, nonetheless it is evident that shopstewards, firstly, understand conflict in the workplace as class conflict and, secondly, problematize the causes of xenophobia more than the other respondents.

Weizman, for instance, points out how anti-migrants mobilization is often encouraged by middle-class elements in communities. In his vision, South African small businessmen fear the competition posed by foreign shop owners and try to take advantage from the general xenophobic climate in township to mobilise residents against foreigners:

> "When the foreigners' business became successful some people was annoyed. Xenophobia in Ramaphosa was started by some South African business owner selling liquor because of the competition represented by foreign shoppers. He basically started saying people that nowadays foreigners rule…and they come and don't have respect, they rape our children, sell drugs to the children. These are

stereotypes and now you hear them everywhere but the first rumours were spread by shop owners"

According to this view, local business owners would be critical in fuelling people's resentment toward migrants and in spreading rumours in order to chase the foreign shop owners away from the location. This point is consistent with what Misago (2009; 2012) found in different locations: the central role played by middle-class elements (either local leaders or businessmen) in triggering mobilization against foreigners in order to obtain personal advantage. In De Doorns, a farming area in the Werstern Cape, in November 2009, 3000 foreign nationals mostly from Zimbabwe were displaced as a result of the violent mobilization of their South African neighbours. They were seasonal workers employed by Zimbabwean labour brokers and it has been reported that the violence resulted from the tension between the South African and the Zimbabwean labour brokers. Misago (2009) surmises that the labour brokers might have deliberately triggered the violence by inciting local residents to attack and chase their foreign national neighbour.

What the different points analysed in this paragraph have in common is the relatively high level of information acquired by the respondents to make such points. Understanding conflict and solidarity in the workplace through a class identity lens means being less prone to accept or participate in anti-migrant actions in the workplace or outside it. And, in fact, it seems that what the workers experience in the workplace is brought to the communities. If one on hand the shopstewards try to defuse tensions in the workplace among workers of different nationalities making a point on skills and workers solidarity, on the other they tend to use similar strategies in communities in order to deal with xenophobia. As David puts it:

"As NUMSA Shopsteward we have to participate in community meetings. Every Monday we meet and discuss the issues of the community with the councillor, e.g. crime, water and so on. I hear some people saying that there are Mozambicans who do crime but I tell them is even our people, the problem is not nationality. That's because I'm a member of NUMSA and there they are teaching us we mustn't call these people thugs. We must live together and fight crime with them not against them".

The fact that not all the workers are so thorough about political education reveals a lack of communication in the union. It also emerged that there is a gap between the national and the local level, which will be further explored in relation to the position of NUMSA toward anti-migrant sentiments and practices in the factory and beyond.

4.2.2 Workers who hide

I identified an alleged, by workers both national and foreign national, element of secrecy around the place of origin of foreign workers. Supposedly, they would be 'ashamed'– as mainly South African workers would say - or scared to overtly assert their foreign nationality and they would therefore 'hide' behind a confident use of local languages and denying when openly asked of their country of origin.

The issue of 'hiding' in the factory emerged with almost all the respondents, including shopstewards, South African and foreign workers. David asked about the composition of the workforce in Marco Polo said:

"Marco Polo is very mixed, there are people from every where. For instance in my department we're 38 and there are between 6 to 10 foreigners. I'm not quite sure about the exact number because they don't say they are from outside and they

speak Zulu, Sotho everything…But at least about 6 of them I'm sure [about their origin] because they told me because I am the shopsteward".

In Nonqawuse's description of the department where she works:

"I am in the erection department. We are 34 in the department and there are 4 ladies. The migrants hide; they speak Zulu and Sotho but you can pick there is something different. I think 2 of them are from Mozambique but maybe more. I don't know why they hide. I think they're ashamed to be from there."

This finding would confirm the high level of tension in the area of Germiston concerning interaction between nationals and foreign nationals as demonstrated by the frequent episodes of violence reported in the media and in literature; it also confirms the opportunity to explore these dynamics in the workplaces as the latter are not insulated from society; if, as it seems from the infrequency of anti-migrant violence reported, anti-migrant violence did not erupted in workplaces it does not mean that they are necessarily protected from future attacks.

What happens inside the factory indeed mirrors what happens in community where many foreigners try not to disclose their origin in the hope of avoiding the constant victimization they are subjected to, as will be explained below.

'Hiding' can take various forms including adopting the language, the habits and the practices of the locals. It could also mean physically disappearing from the streets after 5 pm and before 5 am, when the streets are deserted and criminals have all the time to 'go up and down'. As Christiano explained: "Me I don't go around after 5 because the people attack you. I come from the job and stay in the house because I know that in the evening people are going up and down". Hiding can also mean trying to avoid the police and not showing them where you stay:

> "Yesterday I went to buy food, I came from ShopRite with plastics [bags] and the police stopped me asked me for passport, I gave him my ID. Then they asked me for my plastics, I gave them. Then they say, now we take you home. I didn't want to go with them, I left them my plastics and I ran. Yo! I ran fast! The thing is that they want to look where you stay to come back when you get paid. Once the police kept me in their bakkie for four hours until I started fighting the bakkie. They came saying my passport expired. It's not true. Then they open the bakkie and they say: go!. It was 9 at night, if I meet the tsotsis they're going to kill me…I ran home. I speak Zulu but still I can't hide [the informant points to his skin, I guess meaning that his complexion is too dark for him to be believed to be Zulu] I'm originally from Zambesi so I don't even speak Shangaan.I can only run."

The point made by Christiano, and supported by different experiences reported by the other foreign workers, confirms what Polzer (2012) discusses as xenophobia that goes far beyond violence and regards form of exclusion that poorer non nationals experience daily where they live and work.

Last, but definitely not least, hiding can take the form of concealing, with the complicity of management, the position acquired in the workplace. As Charity, an artisan from Zimbabwe was telling me, the factory does not necessarily pay the workers in accordance to their official position. They allegedly adopt a strategy to deal with anti-migrant sentiments against skilled migrant workers. The strategy would consist of formally giving higher position to South African workers – e.g. team-leadership or even supervision - but informally promoting foreign workers to more sophisticated tasks. Foreign workers will be paid accordingly to their tasks and in certain cases even more than their formal supervisor. The situation that emerges thus requires the foreign workers to hide their salary and benefits. As Charity, an artisan from Zimbabwe working at Marco Polo since 2007, explained:

> "With me, I've a nice car, Mazda 3, I bought it last year but I don't drive it. Some guys know, maybe one or two, but not everyone. The guys I found there [co-workers at Marco Polo] and even my supervisor, they are not even driving. For me being a foreigner and driving a car, especially that car, can be a problem. Even if you are South African to make better money you need education. You [SA without education] can be promoted but the company don't pay very good money. They pay depending what you know. (…) Here after 5, 6 year they make you supervisor or team-leader but still the salary doesn't correspond to the new position. It's confusing. So if you see me driving that car, you'd say "I'm the supervisor and I don't drive. This one is from Zim, has been here only 3 years and he drives that car". It starts from there."

The strategy adopted by the company may work in keeping the better skilled workers but it is based on a lie and dumps the responsibility of it on the worker's shoulder. Moreover creating fault line in terms of who knows and who does not know it further fragments the unity of the workforce. In case the lie will be disclosed the factory will risk nothing while the worker may probably incur retaliation from his co-workers. For these reason the solution adopted by management cannot be considered sustainable in the long term and on a generalised basis, from the point of view of labour.

4.3 NUMSA's position

This section of the chapter focuses on NUMSA policies and practices toward xenophobia at the national, provincial and local levels, as reported by the union structures. It is based on a critical analysis of NUMSA's main documents on xenophobia, including, congress resolutions, public statements, leaflets and policy papers and interviews with union officials at the Germiston local office, as well as officials and organisers at the Ekurhuleni Region and head offices. Research on COSATU policy and

responses to xenophobia has already been conducted; therefore, NUMSA policies as a COSATU affiliate will not be analysed[26].

NUMSA has a very solid anti-discrimination and anti-xenophobia policy elaborated since the union's formation in 1987. The preamble of the NUMSA Constitution states that, 'the members of NUMSA fight and oppose discrimination in all its forms within the Union, the workplace and society' (NUMSA, 2009). International solidarity is discussed at the Regional and International Solidarity meetings which take place every year at the regional level and at the national level.

In the aftermath of the xenophobic violence of 2008, NUMSA mini congress, held in June 2009, adopted 10 resolutions against xenophobia that warn about the danger of xenophobia as a force dividing the working class along nationalities and weakening the working class struggle against bourgeoisie (NUMSA, 2012). The document identifies the capitalist system as the main cause of xenophobia because it increases the reserve army of labour and induces the workers fighting each other over scarce resources. The documents also underlies how the position of migrants in the labour market is often a vulnerable one and commits the union addressing specifically the organization of foreign workers.

NUMSA has been having, since the late 1990s, International solidarity committees at the regional and national level. During these gatherings, issues of international solidarity are discussed and campaigns are planned. For instance, as pointed in the Secretariat Report of the 9th NUMSA Congress (NUMSA, 2012: 29) along with a campaign against xenophobia, the regional solidarity committees provided input

[26] For an account of COSATU's responses on xenophobia see Hlatshwayo (2010; 2011).

for campaign in support of workers in Swaziland and of the Palestinians. After the anti-migrant mobilization of 2008 solidarity committee have a specific focus on migration and xenophobia. In the Gauteng solidarity committee held in February 2011, Christine Kunjan, a researcher on migration was invited to discuss the situation of Zimbabwean refugees in South Africa. In the International solidarity committee held in June 2011 a researcher from the International Organization of Migration was invited to talk about the movement of people from the Horn of Africa to South Africa.

Action have been put in place but the result so far has not been satisfying especially when it comes to the union members.

In the course of the investigation, two points emerged that can shed light on the lack of implementation of a thorough plan to tackle the issue of xenophobia, despite its open contradiction with the most central principles of NUMSA politics, in terms of workers unity and international solidarity.

Uncertain foundations of NUMSA's anti-xenophobic stance

The first element is that it appears that the foundations of the NUMSA anti-xenophobia discourse are not as stable as they may look, because they are sometimes contradicted by a sort of denialism on the existence of xenophobia among members.

The commitment to the workers solidarity and militancy, based on a class analysis of social and productive relations, and which is asserted in the union documents, does not always correspond to the words of union officials. The tradition of involvement in community life that made NUMSA one of the most interesting examples of social movement unionism is still present in some structures and it is associated with

committed and grounded positions about xenophobia. Hlokoza Motau thus explains that:

> "Dividing workers on the basis of race, during apartheid, was in fact assisting capitalism exploiting workers. As such we saw that you can't divide workers on the basis of race or origin or they will end up fighting among themselves. During xenophobic riots the poor were fighting the poor. On the issue of discrimination, the NUMSA constitution it's very clear, you have to fight discrimination, that's in the preamble."[27]

Nevertheless it seems that this position is diluted by the individual positions of some officials who see the work of the union as limited to the sphere of production, and as a result tend to ignore any issues related to xenophobia among workers. This position reflects what von Holdt (2002) calls strategic unionism, associated with the inconsistencies in the union's social structure between a constituency committed to politics in the state, through the contribution in the tripartite alliance and in communities, and a more pragmatic group, which can result in ineffective implementation mechanism.

Discrepancy between the local and the national

The second element, which emerged during the investigation, is a gap between the local and the national levels in terms of organizational priorities and political means to understand the national divide among workers. The different environment union officials at these different levels are embedded in might play a role in setting their agenda.

[27] Interview with Hlokoza Motau, Head of the International office, 27th March 2012, NUMSA headquarter.

From the accounts of local NUMSA organizers of xenophobic mobilization, especially at its peak of violence in 2008, it seems that they had neither time nor opportunities to plan a thorough strategy to tackle the roots of violence. There was a compulsion for intervention because life in communities in Ekurhuleni was disrupted; many workers were affected by the violence, scared to leave their shack to go to work. Others were part of community committees that supported the violence, and many were looking to the NUMSA local office for guidance. As a local organizer puts it: "We were compelled because [we were] affected. Workers were not happy to leave the shacks, production was messed up everywhere and workers complained with us and asked to intervene."

However, according to local informants, the union structure did not have the resources and the skills to deal with the mayhem and drew on anecdotal knowledge and common sense to defuse tension among workers of different national backgrounds. The xenophobic climate is probably stronger in the environment where local officials operate than in the public gathering and general meetings attended by national officials.

After 2008 union leaders were asked from the Head International Office to always mention the problem of xenophobia when they would address rallies or general meetings. It appears though that the xenophobic climate on the ground cannot be tackled by abstract and sporadic interventions that sound to the workers as if they were coming from a different world.

A union campaign against xenophobia was started in 2010 and implied the organization of special shopstewards' councils to discuss xenophobia in the workplace and in communities. Pamphlets stating that the "2008 xenophobic riots were a serious

setback to our country struggle" and that "it was workers fighting against workers for the crumbs of the bosses" were distributed to members; moreover guiding questions to administer to the workers were provided in order to conduct an internal survey, as well as a general agenda for discussion. The aim of the campaign was, firstly, to raise awareness among members about the danger of xenophobia as fracturing workers' unity and, secondly, to collect information about members' perceptions of workers of different nationalities. Eventually, NUMSA would have designed a strategy to intervene in communities (Hlokosa Motau, interview).

The first steps though were the campaign and the survey but the response from the regions was very limited. Looking into this issue through union documents and discussions with officials, I found out that at the local level there was a sort of deliberate boycott of the campaign because of the uncertainties of the results. NUMSA politics is generally bottom up and decisions made by the rank and file are taken in great consideration by the national structure. Therefore, regional and local offices knew that the result of the questionnaire they were supposed to administer to the workers could have an unpredictable impact on discussions at all other levels. In the case of xenophobia, the local structures suspected that the response from the members would have been highly reactionary. They therefore decided not to carry on with the process.

As Skumbuzo, from the International office put it:

> I don't think the discussions are deep enough especially at the local and regional level, except when we have international seminars at the regional level. 'Some of the regions decided: "let's keep quiet on the issue of xenophobia" because they have their own way to deal with these issues. They have to deal with these kind of issues in the shop floor and they may not even call it xenophobia. Some of the regions didn't trust their members, they thought that if they raise the issue the

> members may even end up taking a decision against them [immigrants], something like: "no, this people must go today!" Now you don't raise an issue that you can't win.[…] In some of the regions some members made it clear, they're not against legal migrants, people who got papers…they're only concerned about people who are crossing illegally. But it shouldn't be a concern of the working class whether the person is legal or not, the law does not belong to workers, the law belongs to the bourgeoisie…but still some of us they say "no we don't care about the legal migrants…" and they give us stories of crime, drugs, misuse of children'.

To the class analysis proposed by unionists at the national level is opposed the attitude of many members as embedded in the xenophobic climate that permeates South African society. Constant action in communities are identified as necessary to tackle the roots of xenophobia and to start cracking its pervasiveness.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

The research carried out in Ekurhuleni has shown that xenophobic sentiments and practices are not reported in workplaces only because insufficient research has been dedicated to this issue. In the Marco Polo bus factory, as well as in the UCW and in the Hendred Frueh truck factory, xenophobic mobilization has taken place but has not been reported in the news, or researched. This report challenges the assumption underlying the prevalent neglect of workplaces among studies on xenophobia in South Africa, namely that working people are not xenophobic. The finding is confirmed by NUMSA officials who emphasize the difficulty in tackling xenophobia among members because they are embedded in a climate characterized by suspicion toward mobility and foreigners. This climate is amplified by the national discourse and reinforced in communities.

Xenophobia in the workplace may be explained by two factors: the widespread anti-migrant sentiment in society, which also affects workers and the labour movement, and secondly the fact that work identity and solidarity are affected by economic precariousness. Precariousness is a source of constant anxiety for workers. It is not only linked to the use of labour brokers and short-term contracts, but also to the fact that workers feel threatened about the possible closure of the factory because of insufficient orders related to the economic crisis and depressed investment. Workers feel powerless in front of this possible scenario and the context of privatization of services and rising food and electricity prices makes the prospect of losing their job even more terrifying. Even the symbolic power of work appears to be undermined by precariousness as workers know that they will be employed (and able to provide for their family) only as long as the factory will be operating.

Examples of solidarity among workers of different nationalities have nevertheless also been documented, with NUMSA shopstewards in Marco Polo playing an active role in trying to bridge the national divide. These remain however the result of individual initiatives; and the union has not yet developed a coherent strategy to address xenophobia in the workplace.

The impact of NUMSA in the communities of Ekurhuleni emerges as uneven but overall limited. The main reason for this, according to union officials at the national level, is the lack of class consciousness in community organizations.

NUMSA has carried out campaigns and solidarity committees to raise the awareness of the workers on the divisive impact of xenophobia but the results have so far been scarce. The national leadership is aware of anti-migrant sentiments among the workforce through the negative responses received when attempts to address the issue of xenophobia at the local and regional levels have been made.

It emerges that there is a gap between the leadership's understanding of xenophobia, which is grounded in class analysis and based on principles of class solidarity and worker unity, and the perceptions of workers on the ground. The latter tend to see foreign nationals as a threat; in this regard their views conform to the widespread xenophobic climate rather then to the official union stance.

This disjuncture between the union's national and local levels results in a failure to address xenophobia in workplaces and in communities; the issue is mostly tackled in general gatherings and shopstewards' workshops. Otherwise the management of anti-migrant sentiments in the workplace is basically left to those individual shopstewards

who choose to engage the workers about anti-foreigners biases – and, *de facto*, to capital.

The factory's management has thus put in place strategies based on the hiding of the real position and wage of foreigners. In so doing, it has exacerbated divisions in the workforce and left foreign workers to face the risk associated with the secrecy of their actual wage. This has allowed the factory to employ the foreign workers that are needed without addressing the problem of xenophobic sentiments amongst the South African.

Thus, despite a vocal anti-xenophobia position at the organization's level, NUMSA has not yet developed an effective strategy to address the problem in the workplace in a structured manner, and is poorly present in communities.

The union laments a lack of intellectual resources to design a broad strategy to address xenophobia. This could be explained in part by the reluctance of academic research to explore anti-foreign mobilization in workplaces. The pervasiveness of a neoclassical economic approach to violence seems to discourage researchers from entering the hidden abode of production to investigate xenophobia among workers. It is regrettable that labour scholars inadvertently embrace an approach that they are otherwise critical of.

Nevertheless, the genuine political (and human) commitment to worker solidarity showed by individual shopstewards and by officials at the top level is encouraging with regard to future developments. In order for the union to overcome the grassroots anti-foreigner sentiments, it will need to draw on its own history of overcoming divisions among workers in order to build a strong movement. This may imply linking anti-xenophobia campaigns and political education to the effective defence

of the interest of all workers. One promising avenue, suggested by Hlokoza, a national office bearer at NUMSA, is for the union to empower migrants by encouraging them to participate in its activities and to take on roles such as shopsteward: this will ensure that they become (and are perceived) as political agents rather than victims, or profiteers.

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